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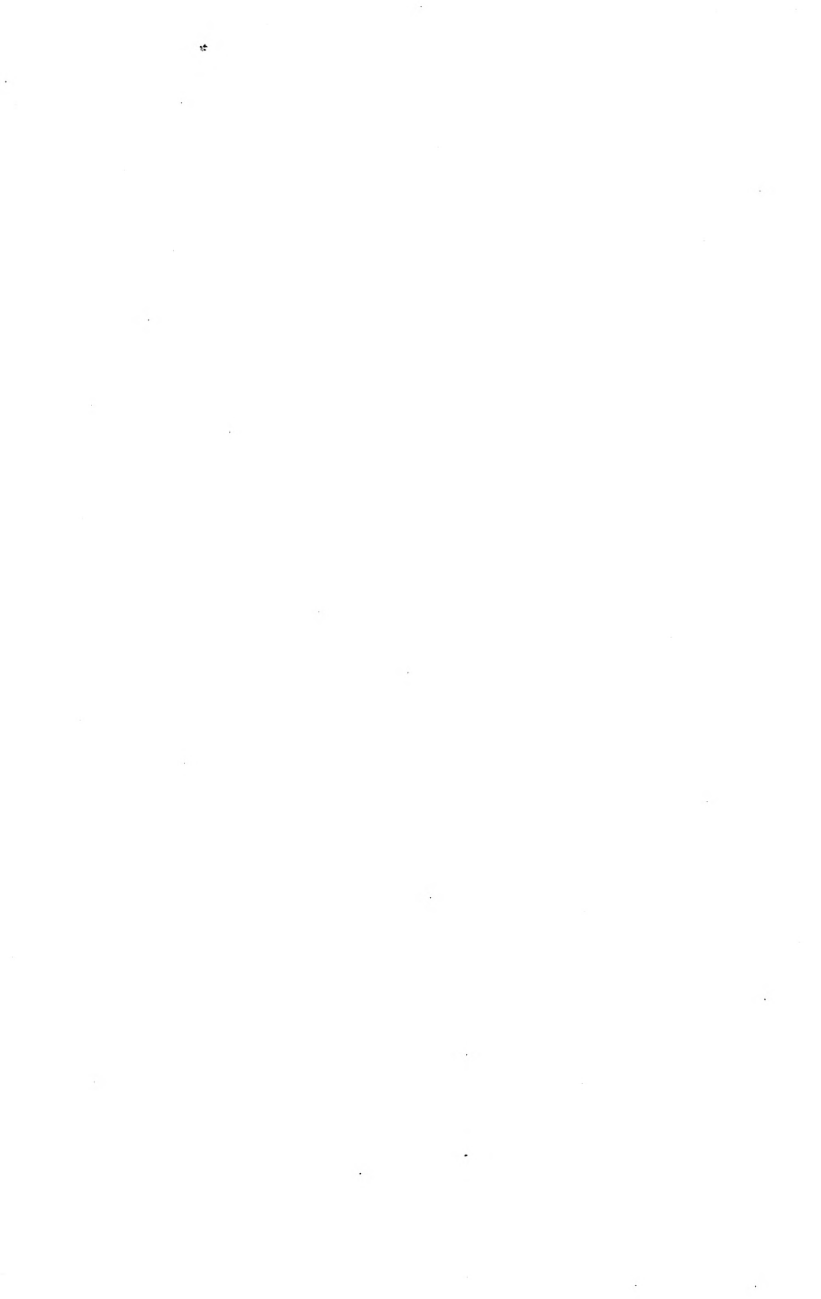


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“ I SAY NO ”

BY

WILKIE COLLINS



IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. III.

London

CHATTO & WINDUS, PICCADILLY

1884

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BOOK THE FOURTH—(continued):

The Country House.

CHAPTER XLII.

COOKING.

THE day after the political meeting was a day of departures, at the pleasant country house.

Miss Darnaway was recalled to the nursery at home. The old squire who did justice to Mr. Wyvil's port-wine went away next, having guests to entertain at his own house. A far more serious loss followed. The three dancing men had engagements which drew them to new spheres of activity in other drawing-rooms. They said, with the same dreary grace of manner, "Very

sorry to go ;" they drove to the railway, arrayed in the same perfect travelling suits of neutral tint ; and they had but one difference of opinion among them—each firmly believed that he was smoking the best cigar to be got in London.

The morning after these departures would have been a dull morning indeed, but for the presence of Mirabel.

When breakfast was over, the invalid Miss Julia established herself on a sofa with a novel. Her father retired to the other end of the house, and profaned the art of music on music's most expressive instrument. Left with Emily, Cecilia, and Francine, Mirabel made one of his happy suggestions. "We are thrown on our own resources," he said. "Let us distinguish ourselves by inventing some entirely new amusement for the day. You young ladies shall sit in council—and I will be secretary." He turned to

Cecilia. "The meeting waits to hear the mistress of the house."

Modest Cecilia appealed to her school-friends for help; addressing herself in the first instance (by the secretary's advice) to Francine, as the eldest. They all noticed another change in this variable young person. She was silent and subdued; and she said wearily, "I don't care what we do—shall we go out riding?"

The unanswerable objection to riding as a form of amusement, was that it had been more than once tried already. Something clever and surprising was anticipated from Emily when it came to her turn. She, too, disappointed expectation. "Let us sit under the trees," was all that she could suggest, "and ask Mr. Mirabel to tell us a story."

Mirabel laid down his pen, and took it on himself to reject this proposal. "Remember," he remonstrated, "that I have an interest in

the diversions of the day. You can't expect me to be amused by my own story. I appeal to Miss Wyvil to invent a pleasure, which will include the secretary."

Cecilia blushed and looked uneasy. "I think I have got an idea," she announced, after some hesitation. "May I propose that we all go to the keeper's lodge?" There her courage failed her, and she hesitated again.

Mirabel gravely registered the proposal, as far as it went. "What are we to do when we get to the keeper's lodge?" he inquired.

"We are to ask the keeper's wife," Cecilia proceeded, "to lend us her kitchen."

"To lend us her kitchen," Mirabel repeated. "And what are we to do in the kitchen?"

Cecilia looked down at her pretty hands crossed on her lap, and answered softly,

“Cook our own luncheon.”

Here was an entirely new amusement, in the most attractive sense of the words! Here was charming Cecilia's interest in the pleasures of the table so happily inspired, that the grateful meeting offered its tribute of applause—even including Francine. The members of the council were young ; their daring digestions contemplated without fear the prospect of eating their own amateur cookery. The one question that troubled them now was what they were to cook.

“I can make an omelette,” Cecilia ventured to say.

“If there is any cold chicken to be had,” Emily added, “I undertake to follow the omelette with a mayonnaise.”

“There are clergymen in the Church of England who are even clever enough to fry potatoes,” Mirabel announced—“and I am one of them. What shall we have next?

A pudding? Miss de Sor, can you make a pudding?”

Francine exhibited another new side to her character—a diffident and humble side. “I am ashamed to say I don’t know how to cook anything,” she confessed; “you had better leave me out of it.”

But Cecilia was now in her element. Her plan of operations was wide enough even to include Francine. “You shall wash the lettuce, my dear, and stone the olives for Emily’s mayonnaise. Don’t be discouraged! You shall have a companion; we will send to the rectory for Miss Plym—the very person to chop parsley and shalot for my omelette. Oh, Emily, what a morning we are going to have!” Her lovely blue eyes sparkled with joy; she gave Emily a kiss which Mirabel must have been more or less than man not to have coveted. “I declare,” cried Cecilia, completely losing her

head, "I'm so excited, I don't know what to do with myself!"

Emily's intimate knowledge of her friend applied the right remedy. "You don't know what to do with yourself?" she repeated. "Have you no sense of duty? Give the cook your orders."

Cecilia instantly recovered her presence of mind. She sat down at the writing-table, and made out a List of eatable productions in the animal and vegetable world, in which every other word was underlined two or three times over. Her serious face was a sight to see, when she rang for the cook, and the two held a privy council in a corner.

On the way to the keeper's lodge, the young mistress of the house headed a procession of servants carrying the raw materials. Francine followed, held in custody by Miss Plym—who took her responsibilities

seriously, and clamoured for instruction in the art of chopping parsley. Mirabel and Emily were together, far behind; they were the only two members of the company whose minds were not occupied in one way or another by the kitchen.

“This child’s play of ours doesn’t seem to interest you,” Mirabel remarked.

“I am thinking,” Emily answered, “of what you said to me about Francine.”

“I can say something more,” he rejoined. “When I noticed the change in her at dinner, I told you she meant mischief. There is another change to-day, which suggests to my mind that the mischief is done.”

“And directed against me?” Emily asked.

Mirabel made no direct reply. It was impossible for *him* to remind her that she had, no matter how innocently, exposed

herself to the jealous hatred of Francine. "Time will tell us, what we don't know now," he replied evasively.

"You seem to have faith in time, Mr. Mirabel."

"The greatest faith. Time is the inveterate enemy of deceit. Sooner or later, every hidden thing is a thing doomed to discovery."

"Without exception?"

"Yes," he answered positively, "without exception."

At that moment Francine stopped, and looked back at them. Did she think that Emily and Mirabel had been talking together long enough? Miss Plym—with the parsley still on her mind—advanced to consult Emily's experience. The two walked on together, leaving Mirabel to overtake Francine. He saw, in her first look at him, the effort that it cost her

to suppress those emotions which the pride of women is most deeply interested in concealing. Before a word had passed, he regretted that Emily had left them together.

"I wish I had your cheerful disposition," she began, abruptly. "I am out of spirits or out of temper—I don't know which; and I don't know why. Do you ever trouble yourself with thinking of the future?"

"As seldom as possible, Miss de Sor. In such a situation as mine, most people have prospects—I have none."

He spoke gravely, conscious of not feeling at ease on his side. If he had been the most modest man that ever lived, he must have seen in Francine's face that she loved him.

When they had first been presented to each other, she was still under the influence of the meanest instincts in her

scheming and selfish nature. She had thought to herself, "With my money to help him, that man's celebrity would do the rest; the best society in England would be glad to receive Mirabel's wife." As the days passed, strong feeling had taken the place of those contemptible aspirations: Mirabel had unconsciously inspired the one passion which was powerful enough to master Francine—sensual passion. Wild hopes rioted in her. Measureless desires which she had never felt before, united themselves with capacities for wickedness, which had been the horrid growth of a few nights—capacities which suggested even viler attempts to rid herself of a supposed rivalry than slandering Emily by means of an anonymous letter. Without waiting for it to be offered, she took Mirabel's arm, and pressed it to her breast as they

slowly walked on. The fear of discovery which had troubled her after she had sent her base letter to the post, vanished at that inspiring moment. She bent her head near enough to him when he spoke to feel his breath on her face.

“There is a strange similarity,” she said softly, “between your position and mine. Is there anything cheering in *my* prospects? I am far away from home—my father and mother wouldn’t care if they never saw me again. People talk about my money! What is the use of money to such a lonely wretch as I am? Suppose I write to London, and ask the lawyer if I may give it all away to some deserving person? Why not to you?”

“My dear Miss de Sor——!”

“Is there anything wrong, Mr. Mirabel, in wishing that I could make you a prosperous man?”

“You must not even talk of such a thing!”

“How proud you are!” she said submissively. “Oh, I can’t bear to think of you in that miserable village—a position so unworthy of your talents and your claims! And you tell me I must not talk about it. Would you have said that to Emily, if she was as anxious as I am to see you in your right place in the world?”

“I should have answered her, exactly as I have answered you.”

“She will never embarrass you, Mr Mirabel, by being as sincere as I am. Emily can keep her own secrets.”

“Is she to blame for doing that?”

“It depends on your feeling for her.”

“What feeling do you mean?”

“Suppose you heard she was engaged to be married?” Francine suggested.

Mirabel's manner—studiously cold and formal thus far—altered on a sudden. He looked with unconcealed anxiety at Francine. “Do you say that seriously?” he asked.

“I said ‘suppose’ I don't exactly know that she is engaged.”

“What *do* you know?”

“Oh, how interested you are in Emily! She is admired by some people. Are you one of them?”

Mirabel's experience of women warned him to try silence as a means of provoking her into speaking plainly. The experiment succeeded: Francine returned to the question that he had put to her, and abruptly answered it.

“You may believe me or not, as you like—I know of a man who is in love with her. He has had his opportunities; and he has made good use of them. Would you like to know who he is?”

“I should like to know anything which you may wish to tell me.” He did his best to make the reply in a tone of commonplace politeness—and he might have succeeded in deceiving a man. The woman’s quicker ear told her that he was angry. Francine took the full advantage of that change in her favour.

“I am afraid your good opinion of Emily will be shaken,” she quietly resumed, “when I tell you that she has encouraged a man who is only drawing-master at a school. At the same time, a person in her circumstances—I mean she has no money—ought not to be very hard to please. Of course she has never spoken to you of Mr. Alban Morris?”

“Not that I remember.”

Only four words—but they satisfied Francine.

The one thing wanting to complete the

obstacle which she had now placed in Emily's way, was that Alban Morris should enter on the scene. He might hesitate ; but, if he was really fond of Emily, the anonymous letter would sooner or later bring him to Monksmoor. In the meantime, her object was gained. She dropped Mirabel's arm.

“Here is the lodge,” she said gaily—
“I declare Cecilia has got an apron on already! Come, and cook.”

CHAPTER XLIII.

SOUNDING.

MIRABEL left Francine to enter the lodge by herself. His mind was disturbed: he felt the importance of gaining time for reflection before he and Emily met again.

The keeper's garden was at the back of the lodge. Passing through the wicket-gate, he found a little summer-house at a turn in the path. Nobody was there: he went in and sat down.

At intervals, he had even yet encouraged himself to underrate the true importance of the feeling which Emily had awakened in him. There was an end to all self-deception now. After what Francine had

said to him, this shallow and frivolous man no longer resisted the all-absorbing influence of love. He shrank under the one terrible question that forced itself on his mind:—Had that jealous girl spoken the truth?

In what process of investigation could he trust, to set this anxiety at rest? To apply openly to Emily would be to take a liberty, which Emily was the last person in the world to permit. In his recent intercourse with her he had felt more strongly than ever the importance of speaking with reserve. He had been scrupulously careful to take no unfair advantage of his opportunity, when he had removed her from the meeting, and when they had walked together, with hardly a creature to observe them, in the lonely outskirts of the town. Emily's gaiety and good humour had not led him astray: he knew that these were bad signs, viewed in the interests of love. His one

hope of touching her deeper sympathies was to wait for the help that might yet come from time and chance. With a bitter sigh, he resigned himself to the necessity of being as agreeable and amusing as ever: it was just possible that he might lure her into alluding to Alban Morris, if he began innocently by making her laugh.

As he rose to return to the lodge, the keeper's little terrier, prowling about the garden, looked into the summer-house. Seeing a stranger, the dog showed his teeth and growled.

Mirabel shrank back against the wall behind him, trembling in every limb. His eyes stared in terror as the dog came nearer; barking in high triumph over the discovery of a frightened man whom he could bully. Mirabel called out for help. A labourer at work in the garden ran to the place—and stopped with a broad grin of amusement at

seeing a grown man terrified by a barking dog. "Well," he said to himself, after Mirabel had passed out under protection, "there goes a coward if ever there was one yet!"

Mirabel waited a minute behind the lodge to recover himself. He had been so completely unnerved that his hair was wet with perspiration. While he used his handkerchief, he shuddered at other recollections than the recollection of the dog. "After that night at the inn," he thought, "the least thing frightens me!"

He was received by the young ladies with cries of derisive welcome. "Oh, for shame! for shame! here are the potatoes already cut, and nobody to fry them!"

Mirabel assumed the mask of cheerfulness—with the desperate resolution of an actor, amusing his audience at a time of domestic distress. He astonished the keeper's

wife by showing that he really knew how to use her frying-pan. Cecilia's omelette was tough—but the young ladies eat it. Emily's mayonnaise sauce was almost as liquid as water—they swallowed it nevertheless by the help of spoons. The potatoes followed, crisp and dry and delicious—and Mirabel became more popular than ever. "He is the only one of us," Cecilia sadly acknowledged, "who knows how to cook."

When they all left the lodge for a stroll in the park, Francine attached herself to Cecilia and Miss Plym. She resigned Mirabel to Emily—in the happy belief that she had paved the way for a misunderstanding between them.

The merriment at the luncheon table had revived Emily's good spirits. She had a light-hearted remembrance of the failure of her sauce. Mirabel saw her smiling to herself. "May I ask what amuses you?" he said.

"I was thinking of the debt of gratitude that we owe to Mr. Wyvil," she replied. "If he had not persuaded you to return to Monksmoor, we should never have seen the famous Mr. Mirabel with a frying-pan in his hand, and never have tasted the only good dish at our luncheon."

Mirabel tried vainly to adopt his companion's easy tone. Now that he was alone with her, the doubts that Francine had aroused shook the prudent resolution at which he had arrived in the garden. He ran the risk, and told Emily plainly why he had returned to Mr. Wyvil's house.

"Although I am sensible of our host's kindness," he answered, "I should have gone back to my parsonage—but for You."

She declined to understand him seriously. "Then the affairs of your parish are neglected—and I am to blame!" she said.

"Am I the first man who has neglected

his duties for your sake?" he asked. "I wonder whether the masters, at school, had the heart to report you when you neglected your lessons?"

She thought of Alban—and betrayed herself by a heightened colour. The moment after, she changed the subject. Mirabel could no longer resist the conclusion that Francine had told him the truth.

"When do you leave us?" she inquired.

"To-morrow is Saturday — I must go back as usual."

"And how will your deserted parish receive you?"

He made a desperate effort to be as amusing as usual

"I am sure of preserving my popularity," he said, "while I have a cask in the cellar, and a few spare sixpences in my pocket. The public spirit of my parishioners asks for nothing but money and

beer. Before I went to that wearisome meeting, I told my housekeeper that I was going to make a speech about reform. She didn't know what I meant. I explained that reform might increase the number of British citizens who had the right of voting at elections for parliament. She brightened up directly. ‘Ah,’ she said, ‘I’ve heard my husband talk about elections. The more there are of them (*he* says) the more money he’ll get for his vote. I’m all for reform.’ On my way out of the house, I tried the man who works in my garden on the same subject. He didn’t look at the matter from the housekeeper’s sanguine point of view. ‘I don’t deny that parliament once gave me a good dinner for nothing at the public house,’ he admitted. ‘But that was years ago—and (you’ll excuse me, sir) I hear nothing of another dinner to come. It’s a matter of

opinion, of course. I don't myself believe in reform.' There are specimens of the state of public spirit in our village!" He paused. Emily was listening—but he had not succeeded in choosing a subject that amused her. He tried a topic more nearly connected with his own interests; the topic of the future. "Our good friend has asked me to prolong my visit, after Sunday's duties are over," he said. "I hope I shall find you here, next week?"

"Will the affairs of your parish allow you to come back?" Emily asked mischievously.

"The affairs of my parish—if you force me to confess it—were only an excuse."

"An excuse for what?"

"An excuse for keeping away from Monksmoor—in the interests of my own tranquillity. The experiment has failed. While you are here, I can't keep away."

She still declined to understand him seriously. "Must I tell you in plain words that flattery is thrown away on me?" she said.

"Flattery is not offered to you," he answered gravely. "I beg your pardon for having led to the mistake by talking of myself." Having appealed to her indulgence by that act of submission, he ventured on another distant allusion to the man whom he hated and feared. "Shall I meet any friends of yours," he resumed, "when I return on Monday?"

"What do you mean?"

"I only meant to ask if Mr. Wyvil expects any new guests?"

As he put the question, Cecilia's voice was heard behind them, calling to Emily. They both turned round. Mr. Wyvil had joined his daughter and her two friends. He advanced to meet Emily.

“I have some news for you that you little expect,” he said. “A telegram has just arrived from Netherwoods. Mr. Alban Morris has got leave of absence, and is coming here to-morrow.”

CHAPTER XLIV.

COMPETING.

TIME at Monksmoor had advanced to the half hour before dinner, on Saturday evening.

Cecilia and Francine, Mr. Wyvil and Mirabel, were loitering in the conservatory. In the drawing-room, Emily had been considerately left alone with Alban. He had missed the early train from Netherwoods; but he had arrived in time to dress for dinner, and to offer the necessary explanations.

If it had been possible for Alban to allude to the anonymous letter, he might have owned that his first impulse had led

him to destroy it, and to assert his confidence in Emily by refusing Mr. Wyvil's invitation. But try as he might to forget them, the base words that he had read remained in his memory. Irritating him at the outset, they had ended in rousing his jealousy. Under that delusive influence, he persuaded himself that he had acted, in the first instance, without due consideration. It was surely his interest—it might even be his duty—to go to Mr. Wyvil's house, and judge for himself. After some last wretched moments of hesitation, he had decided on effecting a compromise with his own better sense, by consulting Miss Ladd. That excellent lady did exactly what he had expected her to do. She made arrangements which granted him leave of absence, from the Saturday to the Tuesday following. The excuse which had served him, in telegraphing to Mr. Wyvil, must now be

repeated, in accounting for his unexpected appearance to Emily. "I found a person to take charge of my class," he said; "and I gladly availed myself of the opportunity of seeing you again."

After observing him attentively, while he was speaking to her, Emily owned, with her customary frankness, that she had noticed something in his manner which left her not quite at her ease.

"I wonder," she said, "if there is any foundation for a doubt that has troubled me?" To his unutterable relief, she at once explained what the doubt was. "I am afraid I offended you, in replying to your letter about Miss Jethro."

In this case, Alban could enjoy the luxury of speaking unreservedly. He confessed that Emily's letter had disappointed him.

"I expected you to answer me with

less reserve," he replied; "and I began to think I had acted rashly in writing to you at all. When there is a better opportunity, I may have a word to say——" He was apparently interrupted by something that he saw in the conservatory. Looking that way, Emily perceived that Mirabel was the object which had attracted Alban's attention. The vile anonymous letter was in his mind again. Without a preliminary word to prepare Emily, he suddenly changed the subject. "How do you like the clergyman?" he asked.

"Very much indeed," she replied without the slightest embarrassment. "Mr. Mirabel is clever and agreeable—and not at all spoilt by his success. I am sure," she said innocently, "you will like him too."

Alban's face answered her unmistakably in the negative sense—but Emily's attention was drawn the other way by Fran-

cine. She joined them at the moment, on the look-out for any signs of an encouraging result which her treachery might already have produced. Alban had been inclined to suspect her, when he had received the letter. He rose and bowed as she approached. Something—he was unable to realise what it was—told him, in the moment when they looked at each other, that his suspicion had hit the mark.

In the conservatory the ever-amiable Mirabel had left his friends for awhile in search of flowers for Cecilia. She turned to her father when they were alone, and asked him which of the gentlemen was to take her in to dinner—Mr. Mirabel or Mr. Morris?

"Mr. Morris, of course," he answered. "He is the new guest—and he turns out to be more than the equal, socially-speaking, of our other friend. When I showed

him his room, I asked if he was related to a man who bore the same name—a fellow student of mine, years and years ago, at college. He is my friend's younger son; one of a ruined family—but persons of high distinction in their day.”

Mirabel returned with the flowers, just as dinner was announced.

“You are to take Emily to-day,” Cecilia said to him, leading the way out of the conservatory. As they entered the drawing-room, Alban was just offering his arm to Emily. “Papa gives you to me, Mr. Morris,” Cecilia explained pleasantly. Alban hesitated, apparently not understanding the allusion. Mirabel interfered with his best grace: “Mr. Wyvil offers you the honour of taking his daughter to the dining-room.” Alban's face darkened ominously, as the elegant little clergyman gave his arm to Emily, and followed Mr. Wyvil and Fran-

cine out of the room. Cecilia looked at her silent and surly companion, and almost envied her lazy sister, dining—under cover of a convenient headache—in her own room.

Having already made up his mind that Alban Morris required careful handling, Mirabel waited a little before he led the conversation as usual. Between the soup and the fish, he made an interesting confession, addressed to Emily in the strictest confidence.

“I have taken a fancy to your friend Mr. Morris,” he said. “First impressions, in my case, decide everything; I like people or dislike them on impulse. That man appeals to my sympathies. Is he a good talker?”

“I should say Yes,” Emily answered prettily, “if *you* were not present.”

Mirabel was not to be beaten, even by a woman, in the art of paying compliments.

He looked admiringly at Alban (sitting opposite to him), and said: "Let us listen."

This flattering suggestion not only pleased Emily—it artfully served Mirabel’s purpose. That is to say, it secured him an opportunity for observation of what was going on, at the other side of the table.

Alban’s instincts as a gentleman had led him to control his irritation, and to regret that he had suffered it to appear. Anxious to please, he presented himself at his best. Gentle Cecilia forgave and forgot the angry look which had startled her. Mr. Wyvil was delighted with the son of his old friend. Emily felt secretly proud of the good opinions which her admirer was gathering; and Francine saw with pleasure that he was asserting his claim to Emily’s preference, in the way of all others which would be most likely to discourage his rival. These various impressions--produced

while Alban's enemy was ominously silent -- began to suffer an imperceptible change, from the moment when Mirabel decided that his time had come to take the lead. A remark made by Alban offered him the chance for which he had been on the watch. He agreed with the remark; he enlarged on the remark; he was brilliant and familiar, and instructive and amusing—and still it was all due to the remark. Alban's temper was once more severely tried. Mirabel's mischievous object had not escaped his penetration. He did his best to put obstacles in the adversary's way—and was baffled, time after time, with the readiest ingenuity. If he interrupted—the sweet-tempered clergyman submitted, and went on. If he differed—modest Mr. Mirabel said in the most amiable manner, "I dare say I am wrong," and handled the topic from his opponent's point of view.

Never had such a perfect Christian sat before at Mr. Wyvil's table: not a hard word, not an impatient look, escaped him. The longer Alban resisted, the more surely he lost ground in the general estimation. Cecilia was disappointed; Emily was grieved; Mr. Wyvil's favourable opinion began to waver; Francine was disgusted. When dinner was over, and the carriage was waiting to take the shepherd back to his flock by moonlight, Mirabel's triumph was complete. He had made Alban the innocent means of publicly exhibiting his perfect temper and perfect politeness, under their best and brightest aspect.

So that day ended. Sunday promised to pass quietly, in the absence of Mirabel. The morning came—and it seemed doubtful whether the promise would be fulfilled.

Francine had passed an uneasy night.

No such encouraging result as she had anticipated had hitherto followed the appearance of Alban Morris at Monksmoor. He had clumsily allowed Mirabel to improve his position--while he had himself lost ground--in Emily's estimation. If this first disastrous consequence of the meeting between the two men was permitted to repeat itself on future occasions, Emily and Mirabel would be brought more closely together, and Alban himself would be the unhappy cause of it. Francine rose, on the Sunday morning, before the table was laid for breakfast--resolved to try the effect of a timely word of advice.

Her bed-room was situated in the front of the house. The man she was looking for presently passed within her range of view from the window, on his way to take a morning walk in the park. She followed him immediately.

“Good morning, Mr. Morris.”

He raised his hat and bowed—without speaking, and without looking at her.

“We resemble each other in one particular,” she proceeded, graciously; “we both like to breathe the fresh air before breakfast.”

He said exactly what common politeness obliged him to say, and no more—he said, “Yes.”

Some girls might have been discouraged. Francine went on.

“It is no fault of mine, Mr. Morris, that we have not been better friends. For some reason, into which I don’t presume to inquire, you seem to distrust me. I really don’t know what I have done to deserve it.”

“Are you sure of that?” he asked—eyeing her suddenly and searchingly as he spoke.

Her hard face settled into a rigid look ; her eyes met his eyes with a stony defiant stare. Now, for the first time, she knew that he suspected her of having written the anonymous letter. Every evil quality in her nature steadily defied him. A hardened old woman could not have sustained the shock of discovery with a more devilish composure than this girl displayed. "Perhaps, you will explain yourself," she said.

"I *have* explained myself," he answered.

"Then I must be content," she rejoined, "to remain in the dark. I had intended, out of my regard for Emily, to suggest that you might—with advantage to yourself, and to interests that are very dear to you—be more careful in your behaviour to Mr. Mirabel. Are you disposed to listen to me?"

"Do you wish me to answer that question plainly, Miss de Sor?"

“I insist on your answering it plainly.”

“Then I am *not* disposed to listen to you?”

“May I know why? or am I to be left in the dark again?”

“You are to be left, if you please, to your own ingenuity.”

Francine looked at him, with a malignant smile. “One of these days, Mr. Morris—I will deserve your confidence in my ingenuity.” She said it, and went back to the house.

This was the only element of disturbance that troubled the perfect tranquillity of the day. What Francine had proposed to do, with the one idea of making Alban serve her purpose, was accomplished a few hours later by Emily’s influence for good over the man who loved her.

They passed the afternoon together uninterruptedly in the distant solitudes of the

park. In the course of conversation, Emily found an opportunity of discreetly alluding to Mirabel. "You mustn't be jealous of our clever little friend," she said; "I like him, and admire him; but——"

"But you don't love him?"

She smiled at the eager way in which Alban put the question. "There is no fear of that," she answered brightly.

"Not even if you discovered that he loves you?"

"Not even then. Are you content at last? Promise me not to be rude to Mr. Mirabel again."

"For his sake?"

"No—for my sake. I don't like to see you place yourself at a disadvantage towards another man; I don't like you to disappoint me."

The happiness of hearing her say those words transfigured him—the manly beauty

of his earlier and happier years seemed to have returned to Alban. He took her hand—he was too agitated to speak.

“You are forgetting Mr. Mirabel,” she reminded him gently.

“I will be all that is civil and kind to Mr. Mirabel; I will like him and admire him as you do. Oh, Emily, are you a little, only a very little, fond of me?”

“I don’t quite know.”

“May I try to find out?”

“How?” she asked.

Her fair cheek was very near to him. The softly-rising colour on it said, Answer me here—and he answered.

CHAPTER XLV.

MISCHIEF-MAKING.

ON Monday, Mirabel made his appearance—and the demon of discord returned with him.

Alban had employed the earlier part of the day in making a sketch in the park—intended as a little present for Emily. Presenting himself in the drawing-room, when his work was completed, he found Cecilia and Francine alone. He asked where Emily was.

The question had been addressed to Cecilia. Francine answered it.

"Emily musn't be disturbed," she said

"Why not?"

“She is with Mr. Mirabel in the rose-garden. I saw them talking together—evidently feeling the deepest interest in what they were saying to each other. Don’t interrupt them—you will only be in the way.”

Cecilia at once protested against this last assertion. “She is trying to make mischief, Mr. Morris—don’t believe her. I am sure they will be glad to see you, if you join them in the garden.”

Francine rose, and left the room. She turned, and looked at Alban as she opened the door. “Try it,” she said—“and you will find I am right.”

“Francine sometimes talks in a very ill-natured way,” Cecilia gently remarked. “Do you think she means it, Mr. Morris?”

“I had better not offer an opinion,” Alban replied.

"Why?"

"I can't speak impartially; I dislike Miss de Sor."

There was a pause. Alban's sense of self-respect forbade him to try the experiment which Francine had maliciously suggested. His thoughts—less easy to restrain—wandered in the direction of the garden. The attempt to make him jealous had failed; but he was conscious, at the same time, that Emily had disappointed him. After what they had said to each other in the park, she ought to have remembered that women are at the mercy of appearances. If Mirabel had something of importance to say to her, she might have avoided exposing herself to Francine's spiteful misconstruction: it would have been easy to arrange with Cecilia that a third person should be present at the interview.

While he was absorbed in these reflections, Cecilia—embarrassed by the silence—was trying to find a topic of conversation. Alban roughly pushed his sketch-book away from him, on the table. Was he displeased with Emily? The same question had occurred to Cecilia at the time of the correspondence, on the subject of Miss Jethro. To recall those letters led her, by natural sequence, to another effort of memory. She was reminded of the person who had been the cause of the correspondence: her interest was revived in the mystery of Miss Jethro.

“Has Emily told you that I have seen your letter?” she asked.

He roused himself with a start. “I beg your pardon. What letter are you thinking of?”

“I was thinking of the letter which mentions Miss Jethro’s strange visit.

Emily was so puzzled and so surprised that she showed it to me—and we both consulted my father. Have you spoken to Emily about Miss Jethro? "

"I have tried—but she seemed to be unwilling to pursue the subject."

"Have you made any discoveries since you wrote to Emily? "

"No. The mystery is as impenetrable as ever."

As he replied in those terms, Mirabel entered the conservatory from the garden, evidently on his way to the drawing-room.

To see the man, whose introduction to Emily it had been Miss Jethro's mysterious object to prevent—at the very moment when he had been speaking of Miss Jethro herself—was, not only a temptation to curiosity, but a direct incentive (in Emily's own interests) to make an effort at discovery. Alban pursued the conversa-

tion with Cecilia, in a tone which was loud enough to be heard in the conservatory.

“The one chance of getting any information that I can see,” he proceeded, “is to speak to Mr. Mirabel.”

“I shall be only too glad, if I can be of any service to Miss Wyvil and Mr. Morris.”

With those obliging words, Mirabel made a dramatic entry, and looked at Cecilia with his irresistible smile. Startled by his sudden appearance, she unconsciously assisted Alban’s design. Her silence gave him the opportunity of speaking in her place.

“We were talking,” he said quietly to Mirabel, “of a lady with whom you are acquainted.”

“Indeed! May I ask the lady’s name?”

“Miss Jethro.”

Mirabel sustained the shock with extraordinary self-possession—so far as any betrayal by sudden movement was concerned.

But his colour told the truth: it faded to paleness—it revealed even to Cecilia’s eyes, a man overpowered by fright.

Alban offered him a chair. He refused to take it by a gesture. Alban tried an apology next. “I am afraid I have ignorantly revived some painful associations. Pray excuse me.”

The apology roused Mirabel: he felt the necessity of offering some explanation. In timid animals, the one defensive capacity which is always ready for action is cunning. Mirabel was too wily to dispute the inference—the inevitable inference—which anyone must have drawn, after seeing the effect on him that the name of Miss Jethro had produced. He admitted that “painful associations” had been revived, and deplored the “nervous sensibility” which had permitted it to be seen.

“No blame can possibly attach to *you*,

my dear sir," he continued, in his most amiable manner. "Will it be indiscreet, on my part, if I ask how you first became acquainted with Miss Jethro?"

"I first became acquainted with her, at Miss Ladd's school," Alban answered. "She was, for a short time only, one of the teachers; and she left her situation rather suddenly." He paused—but Mirabel made no remark. "After an interval of a few months," he resumed, "I saw Miss Jethro again. She called on me at my lodgings, near Netherwoods."

"Merely to renew your former acquaintance?"

Mirabel made that inquiry with an eager anxiety for the reply which he was quite unable to conceal. Had he any reason to dread what Miss Jethro might have it in her power to say of him to another person? Alban was in no way pledged to secrecy;

and he was determined to leave no means untried of throwing light on Miss Jethro's mysterious warning. He repeated the plain narrative of the interview, which he had communicated by letter to Emily. Mirabel listened, without making any remark.

"After what I have told you, can you give me no explanation?" Alban asked.

"I am quite unable, Mr. Morris, to help you."

Was he lying? or speaking the truth? The impression produced on Alban was that he had spoken the truth.

Women are never so ready as men to resign themselves to the disappointment of their hopes. Cecilia, silently listening up to this time, now ventured to speak—animated by her sisterly interest in Emily.

"Can you not tell us," she said to Mirabel, "why Miss Jethro tried to prevent Emily Brown from meeting you, here?"

“I know no more of her motive than you do,” Mirabel replied.

Alban interposed. “Miss Jethro left me,” he said, “with the intention—quite openly expressed—of trying to prevent you from accepting Mr. Wyvil’s invitation. Did she make the attempt?”

Mirabel admitted that she had made the attempt. “But,” he added, “without mentioning Miss Emily’s name. I was asked to postpone my visit, as a favour to herself, because she had her own reasons for wishing it. I had *my* reasons,” (he bowed with gallantry to Cecilia) “for being eager to have the honour of knowing Mr. Wyvil and his daughter; and I refused.”

Once more, the doubt arose: was he lying? or speaking the truth? And, once more, Alban could not resist the conclusion that he was speaking the truth.

"There is one thing I should like to know," Mirabel continued, after some hesitation. "Has Miss Emily been informed of this strange affair?"

"Certainly!"

Mirabel seemed to be disposed to continue his inquiries—and suddenly changed his mind. Was he beginning to doubt if Alban had spoken without concealment, in describing Miss Jethro's visit? Was he still afraid of what Miss Jethro might have said of him? In any case, he changed the subject, and made an excuse for leaving the room.

"I am forgetting my errand," he said to Alban. "Miss Emily was anxious to know if you had finished your sketch. I must tell her that you have returned."

He bowed and withdrew.

Alban rose to follow him—and checked himself.

“No,” he thought, “I trust Emily!” He sat down again by Cecilia’s side.

Mirabel had indeed returned to the rose-garden. He found Emily employed as he had left her, in making a crown of roses, to be worn by Cecilia in the evening. But, in one other respect, there was a change. Francine was present.

“Excuse me for sending you on a needless errand,” Emily said to Mirabel; “Miss de Sor tells me Mr. Morris has finished his sketch. She left him in the drawing-room—why didn’t you bring him here?”

“He was talking with Miss Wyvil.”

Mirabel answered absently—with his eyes on Francine. He gave her one of those significant looks, which says to a third person, “Why are you here?” Francine’s jealousy declined to understand him. He tried a broader hint, in words.

"Are you going to walk in the garden?" he said.

Francine was impenetrable. "No," she answered, "I am going to stay here with Emily."

Mirabel had no choice but to yield. Imperative anxieties forced him to say, in Francine's presence, what he had hoped to say to Emily privately.

"When I joined Miss Wyvil and Mr. Morris," he began, "what do you think they were doing? They were talking of—Miss Jethro."

Emily dropped the rose-crown on her lap. It was easy to see that she had been disagreeably surprised.

"Mr. Morris has told me the curious story of Miss Jethro's visit," Mirabel continued; "but I am in some doubt whether he has spoken to me without reserve. Perhaps he expressed himself more freely

when he spoke to *you*. Miss Jethro may have said something to him which tended to lower me in your estimation?"

"Certainly not, Mr. Mirabel—so far as I know. If I had heard anything of the kind, I should have thought it my duty to tell you. Will it relieve your anxiety, if I go at once to Mr. Morris, and ask him plainly whether he has concealed anything from you or from me?"

Mirabel gratefully kissed her hand. "Your kindness overpowers me," he said—speaking, for once, with true emotion.

Emily immediately returned to the house. As soon as she was out of sight, Francine approached Mirabel, trembling with suppressed rage.

CHAPTER XLVI.

PRETENDING.

MISS DE SOR began cautiously with an apology. “Excuse me, Mr. Mirabel, for reminding you of my presence.”

Mr. Mirabel made no reply.

“I beg to say,” Francine proceeded, “that I didn’t intentionally see you kiss Emily’s hand.”

Mirabel stood, looking at the roses which Emily had left on her chair, as completely absorbed in his own thoughts as if he had been alone in the garden.

“Am I not even worth notice?” Francine asked. “Ah, I know to whom I am indebted for your neglect!” She took him familiarly by the arm, and burst into a

harsh laugh. "Tell me now, in confidence—do you think Emily is fond of you?"

The impression left by Emily's kindness was still fresh in Mirabel's memory: he was in no humour to submit to the jealous resentment of a woman whom he regarded with perfect indifference. Through the varnish of politeness which overlaid his manner, there rose to the surface the underlying insolence, hidden, on all ordinary occasions, from all human eyes. He answered Francine—mercilessly answered her—at last.

"It is the dearest hope of my life that she may be fond of me," he said.

Francine dropped his arm. "And fortune favours your hopes," she added, with an ironical assumption of interest in Mirabel's prospects. "When Mr. Morris leaves us to-morrow, he removes the only obstacle you have to fear. Am I right?"

"No; you are wrong."

"In what way, if you please?"

"In this way. I don't regard Mr. Morris as an obstacle. Emily is too delicate and too kind to hurt his feelings—she is not in love with him. There is no absorbing interest in her mind to divert her thoughts from me. She is idle and happy; she thoroughly enjoys her visit to this house, and I am associated with her enjoyment. There is my chance——!"

He suddenly stopped. Listening to him thus far, unnaturally calm and cold, Francine now showed that she felt the lash of his contempt. A hideous smile passed slowly over her white face. It threatened the vengeance which knows no fear, no pity, no remorse—the vengeance of a jealous woman. Hysterical anger, furious language, Mirabel was prepared for. The smile frightened him.

“Well?” she said scornfully, “why don’t you go on?”

A bolder man might still have maintained the audacious position which he had assumed. Mirabel’s faint heart shrank from it. He was eager to shelter himself under the first excuse that he could find. His ingenuity, paralysed by his fears, was unable to invent anything new. He feebly availed himself of the commonplace trick of evasion which he had read of in novels, and seen in action on the stage.

“Is it possible,” he asked with an over-acted assumption of surprise, “that you think I am in earnest?”

In the case of any other person, Francine would have instantly seen through that flimsy pretence. But the love which accepts the meanest crumbs of comfort that can be thrown to it—which fawns and grovels and deliberately deceives itself,

in its own intensely selfish interests—was the love that burned in Francine's breast. The wretched girl believed Mirabel with such an ecstatic sense of relief that she trembled in every limb, and dropped into the nearest chair.

"*I* was in earnest," she said faintly. "Didn't you see it?"

He was perfectly shameless; he denied that he had seen it, in the most positive manner. "Upon my honour, I thought you were mystifying me, and I humoured the joke."

She sighed, and looked at him with an expression of tender reproach. "I wonder whether I can believe you?" she said softly.

"Indeed you may believe me!" he assured her.

She hesitated—for the pleasure of hesitating. "I don't know. Emily is very

much admired by some men. Why not by you?"

"For the best of reasons," he answered. "She is poor, and I am poor. Those are facts which speak for themselves."

"Yes—but Emily is bent on attracting you. She would marry you to-morrow, if you asked her. Don't attempt to deny it! Besides, you kissed her hand."

"Oh, Miss de Sor!"

"Don't call me 'Miss de Sor!' Call me Francine. I want to know why you kissed her hand."

He humoured her with inexhaustible servility. "Allow me to kiss *your* hand, Francine!—and let me explain that kissing a lady's hand is only a form of thanking her for kindness. You must own that Emily——"

She interrupted him for the third time. "Emily?" she repeated. "Are you as

familiar as that already? Does she call you 'Miles', when you are by yourselves? Is there any effort at fascination which this charming creature has left untried? She told you, no doubt, what a lonely life she leads in her poor little home?"

Even Mirabel felt that he must not permit this to pass.

"She has said nothing to me about herself," he answered. "What I know of her, I know from Mr. Wyvil."

"Oh, indeed! You asked Mr. Wyvil about her family, of course? What did he say?"

"He said she lost her mother when she was a child—and he told me her father had died suddenly, a few years since, of heart complaint."

"Well, and what else?—Never mind now! Here is somebody coming."

The person was only one of the servants. Mirabel felt grateful to the man for inter-

rupting them. Animated by sentiments of a precisely opposite nature, Francine spoke to him sharply.

“What do you want here?”

“A message, Miss.”

“From whom?”

“From Miss Brown.”

“For me?”

“No, Miss.” He turned to Mirabel. “Miss Brown wishes to speak to you, sir, if you are not engaged.”

Francine controlled herself until the man was out of hearing.

“Upon my word, this is too shameless!” she declared indignantly. “Emily can’t leave you with me for five minutes, without wanting to see you again. If you go to her, after all that you have said to me,” she cried, threatening Mirabel with her outstretched hand, “you are the meanest of men!”

He *was* the meanest of men—he carried out his cowardly submission to the last extremity.

"Only say what you wish me to do," he replied.

Even Francine expected some little resistance from a creature bearing the outward appearance of a man. "Oh, do you really mean it?" she asked. "I want you to disappoint Emily. Will you stay here, and let me make your excuses?"

"I will do anything to please you."

Francine gave him a farewell look. Her admiration made a desperate effort to express itself appropriately in words. "You are not a man," she said, "you are an angel!"

Left by himself, Mirabel sat down to rest. He reviewed his own conduct with perfect complacency. "Not one man in a hundred could have managed that she-devil

as I have done," he thought. "How shall I explain matters to Emily?"

Considering this question, he looked by chance at the unfinished crown of roses. "The very thing to help me!" he said—and took out his pocket-book, and wrote these lines on a blank page:

"I have had a scene of jealousy with Miss de Sor, which is beyond all description. To spare *you* a similar infliction, I have done violence to my own feelings. Instead of instantly obeying the message which you have so kindly sent to me, I remain here for a little while—entirely for your sake."

Having torn out the page, and twisted it up among the roses, so that only a corner of the paper appeared in view, Mirabel called to a lad who was at work in the garden, and gave him his directions, accompanied by a shilling. "Take those

flowers to the servants' hall, and tell one of the maids to put them in Miss Brown's room. Stop! Which is the way to the fruit garden?"

The lad gave the necessary directions. Mirabel walked away slowly with his hands in his pockets. His nerves had been shaken; he thought a little fruit might refresh him.

CHAPTER XLVII.

DEBATING.

IN the meanwhile Emily had been true to her promise to relieve Mirabel's anxieties, on the subject of Miss Jethro. Entering the drawing-room in search of Alban, she found him talking with Cecilia, and heard her own name mentioned as she opened the door.

"Here she is at last!" Cecilia exclaimed. "What in the world has kept you all this time in the rose-garden?"

"Has Mr. Mirabel been more interesting than usual?" Alban asked gaily. Whatever sense of annoyance he might have felt in Emily's absence, was forgotten the moment

she appeared; all traces of trouble in his face vanished when they looked at each other.

“You shall judge for yourself,” Emily replied with a smile. “Mr. Mirabel has been speaking to me of a relative who is very dear to him—his sister.”

Cecilia was surprised. “Why has he never spoken to *us* of his sister?” she asked.

“It’s a sad subject to speak of, my dear. His sister lives a life of suffering—she has been for years a prisoner in her room. He writes to her constantly. His letters from Monksmoor have interested her, poor soul. It seems he said something about me—and she has sent a kind message, inviting me to visit her one of these days. Do you understand it now, Cecilia?”

“Of course I do! Tell me—is Mr. Mirabel’s sister older or younger than he is?”

“Older.”

“Is she married?”

“She is a widow.”

“Does she live with her brother?”

Alban asked.

“Oh, no! She has her own house—far away in Northumberland.”

“Is she near Sir Jervis Redwood?”

“I fancy not. Her house is on the coast.”

“Any children?” Cecilia inquired.

“No: she is quite alone. Now, Cecilia, I have told you all I know—and I have something to say to Mr. Morris. No, you needn’t leave us; it’s a subject in which you are interested. A subject,” she repeated, turning to Alban, “which you may have noticed is not very agreeable to me.”

“Miss Jethro?” Alban guessed.

“Yes; Miss Jethro.”

Cecilia’s curiosity instantly asserted itself.

"We have tried to get Mr. Mirabel to enlighten us, and tried in vain," she said. "You are a favourite. Have you succeeded?"

"I have made no attempt to succeed," Emily replied. "My only object is to relieve Mr. Mirabel's anxiety, if I can—with your help, Mr. Morris."

"In what way can I help you?"

"You mustn't be angry."

"Do I look angry?"

"You look serious. It is a very simple thing. Mr. Mirabel is afraid that Miss Jethro may have said something disagreeable about him, which you might hesitate to repeat. Is he making himself uneasy without any reason?"

"Without the slightest reason. I have concealed nothing from Mr. Mirabel."

"Thank you for the explanation." She turned to Cecilia. "May I send one of

the servants with a message? I may as well put an end to Mr. Mirabel's suspense."

The man was summoned, and was despatched with the message. Emily would have done well, after this, if she had abstained from speaking further of Miss Jethro. But Mirabel's doubts had, unhappily, inspired a similar feeling of uncertainty in her own mind. She was now disposed to attribute the tone of mystery in Alban's unlucky letter to some possible concealment, suggested by regard for herself. "I wonder whether *I* have any reason to feel uneasy?" she said—half in jest, half in earnest.

"Uneasy about what?" Alban inquired.

"About Miss Jethro, of course! Has she said anything of me which your kindness has concealed?"

Alban seemed to be a little hurt by the doubt which her question implied. "Was

that your motive,” he asked, “for answering my letter as cautiously as if you had been writing to a stranger?”

“Indeed you are quite wrong!” Emily earnestly assured him. “I was perplexed and startled—and I took Mr. Wyvil’s advice, before I wrote to you. Shall we drop the subject?”

Alban would have willingly dropped the subject—but for that unfortunate allusion to Mr. Wyvil. Emily had unconsciously touched him on a sore place. He had already heard from Cecilia of the consultation over his letter, and had disapproved of it. “I think you were wrong to trouble Mr. Wyvil,” he said.

The altered tone of his voice suggested to Emily that he would have spoken more severely, if Cecilia had not been in the room. She thought him needlessly ready to complain of a harmless proceeding—and

she too returned to the subject, after having proposed to drop it not a minute since!

“You didn’t tell me I was to keep your letter a secret,” she replied.

Cecilia made matters worse—with the best intentions. “I’m sure, Mr. Morris, my father was only too glad to give Emily his advice.”

Alban remained silent—ungraciously silent as Emily thought, after Mr. Wyvil’s kindness to him.

“The thing to regret,” she remarked, “is that Mr. Morris allowed Miss Jethro to leave him without explaining herself. In his place, I should have insisted on knowing why she wanted to prevent me from meeting Mr. Mirabel in this house.”

Cecilia made another unlucky attempt at judicious interference. This time, she tried a gentle remonstrance.

“Remember, Emily, how Mr. Morris was

situated. He could hardly be rude to a lady. And I dare say Miss Jethro had good reasons for not wishing to explain herself."

Francine opened the drawing-room door and heard Cecilia's last words.

"Miss Jethro again!" she exclaimed.

"Where is Mr. Mirabel?" Emily asked.
"I sent him a message."

"He regrets to say he is otherwise engaged for the present," Francine replied with spiteful politeness. "Don't let me interrupt the conversation. Who is this Miss Jethro, whose name is on everybody's lips?"

Alban could keep silent no longer. "We have done with the subject," he said sharply.

"Because I am here?"

"Because we have said more than enough about Miss Jethro already."

“Speak for yourself, Mr. Morris,” Emily answered, resenting the masterful tone which Alban’s interference had assumed. “I have not done with Miss Jethro yet, I can assure you.”

“My dear, you don’t know where she lives,” Cecilia reminded her.

“Leave me to discover it!” Emily answered hotly. “Perhaps Mr. Mirabel knows. I shall ask Mr. Mirabel.”

“I thought you would find a reason for returning to Mr. Mirabel,” Francine remarked.

Before Emily could reply, one of the maids entered the room with a wreath of roses in her hand.

“Mr. Mirabel sends you these flowers, Miss,” the woman said, addressing Emily. “The boy told me they were to be taken to your room. I thought it was a mistake, and I have brought them to you here.”

Francine, who happened to be nearest to the door, took the roses from the girl on pretence of handing them to Emily. Her jealous vigilance detected the one visible morsel of Mirabel's letter, twisted up with the flowers. Had Emily entrapped him into a secret correspondence with her? "A scrap of waste paper among your roses," she said, crumpling it up in her hand as if she meant to throw it away.

But Emily was too quick for her. She caught Francine by the wrist. "Waste paper or not," she said; "it was among my flowers and it belongs to me."

Francine gave up the letter, with a look which might have startled Emily if she had noticed it. She handed the roses to Cecilia. "I was making a wreath for you to wear this evening, my dear—and I left it in the garden. It's not quite finished yet."

Cecilia was delighted. "How lovely it

is!" she exclaimed. "And how very kind of you! I'll finish it myself." She turned away to the conservatory.

"I had no idea I was interfering with a letter," said Francine; watching Emily with fiercely-attentive eyes, while she smoothed out the crumpled paper.

Having read what Mirabel had written to her, Emily looked up, and saw that Alban was on the point of following Cecilia into the conservatory. He had noticed something in Francine's face which he was at a loss to understand, but which made her presence in the room absolutely hateful to him. Emily followed, and spoke to him.

"I am going back to the rose garden," she said.

"For any particular purpose?" Alban inquired.

"For a purpose which, I am afraid, you won't approve of. I mean to ask Mr.

Mirabel if he knows Miss Jethro's address."

"I hope he is as ignorant of it as I am," Alban answered gravely.

"Are we going to quarrel over Miss Jethro, as we once quarrelled over Mrs. Rook?" Emily asked—with the readiest recovery of her good humour. "Come! come! I am sure you are as anxious, in your own private mind, to have this matter cleared up as I am."

"With one difference—that I think of consequences, and you don't." He said it, in his gentlest and kindest manner, and stepped into the conservatory.

"Never mind the consequences," she called after him, "if we can only get at the truth. I hate being deceived!"

"There is no person living who has better reason than you have to say that."

Emily looked round with a start. Alban

was out of hearing. It was Francine who had answered her.

“What do you mean?” she said.

Francine hesitated. A ghastly paleness overspread her face.

“Are you ill?” Emily asked.

“No—I am thinking.”

After waiting for a moment in silence, Emily moved away towards the door of the drawing-room. Francine suddenly held up her hand.

“Stop!” she cried.

Emily stood still.

“My mind is made up,” Francine said.

“Made up—to what?”

“You asked what I meant, just now.”

“I did.”

“Well, my mind is made up to answer you. Miss Emily Brown, you are leading a sadly frivolous life in this house. I am going to give you something more serious

to think about than your flirtation with Mr. Mirabel. Oh, don't be impatient! I am coming to the point. Without knowing it yourself, you have been the victim of deception for years past—cruel deception—wicked deception that puts on the mask of mercy."

"Are you alluding to Miss Jethro?" Emily asked, in astonishment. "I thought you were strangers to each other. Just now, you wanted to know who she was."

"I know nothing about her. I care nothing about her. I am not thinking of Miss Jethro."

"Who are you thinking of?"

"I am thinking," Francine answered, "of your dead father."

CHAPTER XLVIII.

INVESTIGATING.

HAVING revived his sinking energies in the fruit garden, Mirabel seated himself under the shade of a tree, and reflected on the critical position in which he was placed by Francine's jealousy.

If Miss de Sor continued to be Mr. Wyvil's guest, there seemed to be no other choice before Mirabel than to leave Monks-moor—and to trust to a favourable reply to his sister's invitation for the free enjoyment of Emily's society under another roof. Try as he might, he could arrive at no more satisfactory conclusion than this. In his preoccupied state, time passed quickly.

Nearly an hour had elapsed before he rose to return to the house.

Entering the hall, he was startled by a cry of terror in a woman's voice, coming from the upper regions. At the same time Mr. Wyvil, passing along the bedroom corridor after leaving the music-room, was confronted by his daughter, hurrying out of Emily's bedchamber in such a state of alarm that she could hardly speak.

"Gone!" she cried, the moment she saw her father.

Mr. Wyvil took her in his arms and tried to compose her. "Who has gone?" he asked.

"Emily! Oh, papa, Emily has left us! She has heard dreadful news—she told me so herself."

"What news? How did she hear it?"

"I don't know how she heard it. I went back to the drawing-room to show her my roses——"

“Was she alone?”

“Yes! She frightened me—she seemed quite wild. She said, ‘Let me be by myself; I shall have to go home.’ She kissed me—and ran up to her room. Oh, I am such a fool! Anybody else would have taken care not to lose sight of her.”

“How long did you leave her by herself?”

“I can’t say. I thought I would go and tell you. And then I got anxious about her, and knocked at her door, and looked into the room. Gone! gone!”

Mr. Wyvil rang the bell, and confided Cecilia to the care of her maid. Mirabel had already joined him in the corridor. They went downstairs together, and consulted with Alban. He volunteered to make immediate inquiries at the railway station. Mr. Wyvil followed him, as far as the lodge gate which opened on the

high road—while Mirabel went to a second gate, at the opposite extremity of the park.

Mr. Wyvil obtained the first news of Emily. The lodge keeper had seen her pass him, on her way out of the park, in the greatest haste. He had called after her, "Anything wrong, Miss?"—and had received no reply. Asked what time had elapsed since this had happened, he was too confused to be able to answer with any certainty. He knew that she had taken the road which led to the station—and he knew no more.

Mr. Wyvil and Mirabel met again at the house, and instituted an examination of the servants. No further discoveries were made.

The question which occurred to everybody was suggested by the words which Cecilia had repeated to her father. Emily

had said she had "heard dreadful news"—how had that news reached her? The one postal delivery at Monksmoor was in the morning. Had any special messenger arrived, with a letter for Emily? The servants were absolutely certain that no such person had entered the house. The one remaining conclusion suggested that somebody must have communicated the evil tidings by word of mouth. But here again no evidence was to be obtained. No visitor had called during the day, and no new guests had arrived. Investigation was completely baffled.

Alban returned from the railway, with news of the fugitive.

He had reached the station, some time after the departure of the London train. The clerk at the office recognised his description of Emily, and stated that she had taken her ticket for London. The station-

master had opened the carriage door for her, and had noticed that the young lady appeared to be very much agitated. This information obtained, Alban had despatched a telegram to Emily—in Cecilia’s name : “ Pray send us a few words to relieve our anxiety, and let us know if we can be of any service to you.”

This was plainly all that could be done—but Cecilia was not satisfied. If her father had permitted it, she would have followed Emily. Alban comforted her. He apologised to Mr. Wyvil for shortening his visit, and announced his intention of travelling to London by the next train. “ We may renew our inquiries to some advantage,” he added, after hearing what had happened in his absence, “ if we can find out who was the last person who saw her, and spoke to her, before your daughter found her alone in the drawing-room. When I

went out of the room, I left her with Miss de Sor."

The maid who waited on Miss de Sor was sent for. Francine had been out, by herself, walking in the park. She was then in her room, changing her dress. On hearing of Emily's sudden departure, she had been (as the maid reported) "much shocked, and quite at a loss to understand what it meant."

Joining her friends a few minutes later, Francine presented, so far as personal appearance went, a strong contrast to the pale and anxious faces round her. She looked wonderfully well, after her walk. In other respects, she was in perfect harmony with the prevalent feeling. She expressed herself with the utmost propriety; her sympathy moved poor Cecilia to tears.

"I am sure, Miss de Sor, you will try to help us?" Mr. Wyvil began.

"With the greatest pleasure," Francine answered.

"How long were you and Miss Emily Brown together, after Mr. Morris left you?"

"Not more than a quarter of an hour, I should think."

"Did anything remarkable occur in the course of conversation?"

"Nothing whatever."

Alban interfered for the first time.

"Did you say anything," he asked, "which agitated or offended Miss Brown?"

"That's rather an extraordinary question," Francine remarked.

"Have you no other answer to give?" Alban inquired.

"I answer—No!" she said, with a sudden outburst of anger.

There, the matter dropped. While she spoke in reply to Mr. Wyvil, Francine had confronted him without embarrassment.

When Alban interposed, she never looked at him—except when he provoked her to anger. Did she remember that the man who was questioning her, was also the man who had suspected her of writing the anonymous letter? Alban was on his guard against himself, knowing how he disliked her. But the conviction in his own mind was not to be resisted. In some unimaginable way, Francine was associated with Emily's flight from the house.

The answer to the telegram sent from the railway station had not arrived, when Alban took his departure for London. Cecilia's suspense began to grow unendurable: she looked to Mirabel for comfort, and found none. His office was to console, and his capacity for performing that office was notorious among his admirers; but he failed to present himself to advantage, when Mr. Wyvil's lovely daughter had need of

his services. He was, in truth, too sincerely anxious and distressed to be capable of commanding his customary resources of ready-made sentiment and fluently-pious philosophy. Emily's influence had awakened the only earnest and true feeling which had ever ennobled the popular preacher's life.

Towards evening, the long-expected telegram was received at last. What could be said, under the circumstances, it said in these words:

"Safe at home—don't be uneasy about me—will write soon."

With that promise they were, for the time, forced to be content.

Book the Fifth:

THE COTTAGE.

BOOK THE FIFTH:

The Cottage.

CHAPTER XLIX.

EMILY SUFFERS.

MRS ELLMOTHER—left in charge of Emily's place of abode, and feeling sensible of her lonely position from time to time—had just thought of trying the cheering influence of a cup of tea, when she heard a cab draw up at the cottage gate. A violent ring at the bell followed. She opened the door—and found Emily on the steps. One look at that dear and familiar face was enough for the old servant.

“God help us,” she cried, “what's wrong now?”

Without a word of reply, Emily led the

way into the bedchamber which had been the scene of Miss Letitia's death. Mrs. Ellmother hesitated on the threshold. "Why do you bring me in here?" she asked.

"Why did you try to keep me out?" Emily answered.

"When did I try to keep you out, Miss?"

"When I came home from school, to nurse my aunt. Ah, you remember now! Is it true—I ask you here, where your old mistress died—is it true that my aunt deceived me about my father's death? And that you knew it?"

There was dead silence. Mrs. Ellmother trembled horribly—her lips dropped apart—her eyes wandered round the room with a stare of idiotic terror. "Is it her ghost tells you that?" she whispered. "Where is her ghost? The room whirls round and round, Miss—and the air sings in my ears,"

Emily sprang forward to support her. She staggered to a chair, and lifted her great bony hands in wild entreaty. "Don't frighten me," she said. "Stand back."

Emily obeyed her. She dashed the cold sweat off her forehead. "You were talking about your father's death just now," she burst out, in desperate defiant tones. "Well! we know it, and we are sorry for it—your father died suddenly."

"My father died murdered in the inn at Zeeland! All the long way to London, I have tried to doubt it. Oh, me, I know it now!"

Answering in those words, she looked towards the bed. Harrowing remembrances of her aunt's delirious self-betrayal made the room unendurable to her. She ran out. The parlour door was open. Entering the room, she passed by a portrait of her father, which her aunt had hung on

the wall over the fire-place. She threw herself on the sofa, and burst into a passionate fit of crying. "Oh, my father—my dear gentle loving father; my first best truest friend—murdered! murdered! Oh, God, where was your justice, where was your mercy, when he died that dreadful death?"

A hand was laid on her shoulder; a voice said to her, "Hush, my child! God knows best."

Emily looked up, and saw that Mrs. Ellmother had followed her. "You poor old soul," she said, suddenly remembering; "I frightened you in the other room."

"I have got over it, my dear. I am old; and I have lived a hard life. A hard life schools a person. I make no complaints." She stopped, and began to shudder again. "Will you believe me if I tell you something?" she asked. "I

warned my self-willed mistress. Standing by your father's coffin, I warned her. Hide the truth as you may (I said), a time will come when our child will know what you are keeping from her now. One or both of us may live to see it. I am the one who has lived; no refuge in the grave for me. I want to hear about it—there's no fear of frightening or hurting me now—I want to hear how you found it out. Was it by accident, my dear? or did a person tell you?"

Emily's mind was far away from Mrs. Ellmother. She rose from the sofa, with her hands held fast over her aching heart.

"The one duty of my life," she said—"I am thinking of the one duty of my life. Look! I am calm now; I am resigned to my hard lot. Never, never again, can the dear memory of my father be what

it was! From this time, it is the horrid memory of a crime. The crime has gone unpunished; the man has escaped others. He shall not escape Me." She paused, and looked at Mrs. Ellmother absently. "What did you say just now? You want to hear how I know what I know? Naturally! naturally! Sit down here—sit down, my old friend, on the sofa with me—and take your mind back to Netherwoods. Alban Morris——"

Mrs. Ellmother recoiled from Emily in dismay. "Don't tell me *he* had anything to do with it! The kindest of men; the best of men!"

"The man of all men living who least deserves your good opinion or mine," Emily answered sternly.

"You!" Mrs. Ellmother exclaimed, "*you* say that!"

"I say it. He—who won on me to like

him—he was in the conspiracy to deceive me; and you know it! He heard me talk of the newspaper story of the murder of my father—I say, he heard me talk of it composedly, talk of it carelessly, in the innocent belief that it was the murder of a stranger—and he never opened his lips to prevent that horrid profanation! He never even said, Speak of something else; I won't hear you. No more of him! God forbid I should ever see him again. No! Do what I told you. Carry your mind back to Netherwoods. One night, you let Francine de Sor frighten you. You ran away from her into the garden. Keep quiet! At your age, must I set you an example of self-control?"

"I want to know, Miss Emily, where Francine de Sor is now?"

"She is at the house in the country, which I have left."

"Where does she go next, if you please? Back to Miss Ladd?"

"I suppose so. What interest have you in knowing where she goes next?"

"I won't interrupt you, Miss. It's true that I ran away into the garden. I can guess who followed me. How did she find her way to me and Mr. Morris, in the dark?"

"The smell of tobacco guided her—she knew who smoked—she had seen him talking to you, on that very day—she followed the scent—she heard what you two said to each other—and she has repeated it to me. Oh, my old friend, the malice of a revengeful girl has enlightened me, when you, my nurse—and he, my lover—left me in the dark: it has told me how my father died!"

"That's said bitterly, Miss!"

"Is it said truly?"

“No. It isn’t said truly of myself. God knows you would never have been kept in the dark, if your aunt had listened to me. I begged and prayed—I went down on my knees to her—I warned her, as I told you just now. Must I tell *you* what a headstrong woman Miss Letitia was? She insisted. She put the choice before me of leaving her at once and for ever—or giving in. I wouldn’t have given in to any other creature on the face of this earth. I am obstinate, as you have often told me. Well, your aunt’s obstinacy beat mine; I was too fond of her to say No. Besides, if you ask me who was to blame in the first place, I tell you it wasn’t your aunt; she was frightened into it.”

“Who frightened her?”

“Your godfather—the great London surgeon—he who was visiting in our house at the time.”

"Sir Richard?"

"Yes—Sir Richard. He said he wouldn't answer for the consequences, in the delicate state of your health, if we told you the truth. Ah, he had it all his own way after that. He went with Miss Letitia to the inquest; he won over the coroner and the newspaper men to his will; he kept your aunt's name out of the papers; he took charge of the coffin; he hired the undertaker and his men, strangers from London; he wrote the certificate—who but he! Everybody was cap in hand to the famous man!"

"Surely, the servants and the neighbours asked questions?"

"Hundreds of questions! What did that matter to Sir Richard? They were like so many children, in *his* hands. And, mind you, the luck helped him. To begin with, there was the common name. Who was

to pick out your poor father among the thousands of James Browns? Then, again, the house and lands went to the male heir, as they called him—the man your father quarrelled with in the bygone time. He brought his own establishment with him. Long before you got back from the friends you were staying with—don't you remember it?—we had cleared out of the house; we were miles and miles away; and the old servants were scattered abroad, finding new situations wherever they could. How could you suspect us? We had nothing to fear in that way; but my conscience pricked me. I made another attempt to prevail on Miss Letitia, when you had recovered your health. I said, 'There's no fear of a relapse now; break it to her gently, but tell her the truth.' No! Your aunt was too fond of you. She daunted me with dreadful fits of cry-

ing, when I tried to persuade her. And that wasn't the worst of it. She bade me remember what an excitable man your father was—she reminded me that the misery of your mother's death laid him low with brain fever—she said, 'Emily takes after her father; I have heard you say it yourself; she has his constitution, and his sensitive nerves. Don't you know how she loved him — how she talks of him to this day? Who can tell (if we are not careful) what dreadful mischief we may do?' That was how my mistress worked on me. I got infected with her fears; it was as if I had caught an infection of disease. Oh, my dear, blame me if it must be; but don't forget how I have suffered for it since! I was driven away from my dying mistress, in terror of what she might say, while you were watching at her bedside. I have lived in fear

of what you might ask me—and have longed to go back to you—and have not had the courage to do it. Look at me now!”

The poor woman tried to take out her handkerchief; her quivering hand helplessly entangled itself in her dress. “I can’t even dry my eyes,” she said faintly. “Try to forgive me, Miss!”

Emily put her arms round the old nurse’s neck. “It is *you*,” she said sadly, “who must forgive *me*.”

For awhile, they were silent. Through the window that was open to the little garden, came the one sound that could be heard—the gentle trembling of leaves in the evening wind.

The silence was harshly broken by the bell at the cottage door. They both started.

Emily’s heart beat fast. “Who can it be?” she said.

Mrs. Ellmother rose. "Shall I say you can't see anybody?" she asked, before leaving the room.

"Yes! yes!"

Emily heard the door opened—heard low voices in the passage. There was a momentary interval. Then, Mrs. Ellmother returned. She said nothing. Emily spoke to her.

"Is it a visitor?"

"Yes."

"Have you said I can't see anybody?"

"I couldn't say it."

"Why not?"

"Don't be hard on him, my dear. It's Mr. Alban Morris."

CHAPTER L.

MISS LADD ADVISES.

MRS. ELLMOTHER sat by the dying embers of the kitchen fire; thinking over the events of the day in perplexity and distress.

She had waited at the cottage door for a friendly word with Alban, after he had left Emily. The stern despair in his face warned her to let him go in silence. She had looked into the parlour next. Pale and cold, Emily lay on the sofa—sunk in helpless depression of body and mind. “Don’t speak to me,” she whispered; “I am quite worn out.” It was but too plain, that the view of Alban’s conduct which

she had already expressed, was the view to which she had adhered at the interview between them. They had parted in grief—perhaps in anger—perhaps for ever. Mrs. Ellmother lifted Emily in compassionate silence, and carried her upstairs, and waited by her until she slept.

In the still hours of the night, the thoughts of the faithful old servant—dwelling for awhile on past and present—advanced, by slow degrees, to consideration of the doubtful future. Measuring, to the best of her ability, the responsibility which had fallen on her, she felt that it was more than she could bear, or ought to bear, alone. To whom could she look for help?

The gentlefolks at Monksmoor were strangers to her. Doctor Allday was near at hand—but Emily had said, “Don’t send for him; he will torment me with ques-

tions—and I want to keep my mind quiet, if I can.” But one person was left, to whose ever-ready kindness Mrs. Ellmother could appeal—and that person was Miss Ladd.

It would have been easy to ask the help of the good schoolmistress in comforting and advising the favourite pupil whom she loved. But Mrs. Ellmother had another object in view: she was determined that the cold-blooded cruelty of Emily’s treacherous friend should not be allowed to triumph with impunity. If an ignorant old woman could do nothing else, she could tell the plain truth, and could leave Miss Ladd to decide whether such a person as Francine deserved to remain under her care.

To feel justified in taking this step was one thing: to put it all clearly in writing was another. After vainly making the

attempt overnight, Mrs. Ellmother tore up her letter, and communicated with Miss Ladd by means of a telegraphic message, in the morning. "Miss Emily is in great distress. I must not leave her. I have something besides to say to you which cannot be put into a letter. Will you please come to us?"

Later in the forenoon, Mrs. Ellmother was called to the door by the arrival of a visitor. The personal appearance of the stranger impressed her favourably. He was a handsome little gentleman; his manners were winning, and his voice was singularly pleasant to hear.

"I have come from Mr. Wyvil's house in the country," he said; "and I bring a letter from his daughter. May I take the opportunity of asking if Miss Emily is well."

"Far from it, sir, I am sorry to say. She is so poorly that she keeps her bed."

At this reply, the visitor's face revealed such sincere sympathy and regret, that Mrs. Ellmother was interested in him: she added a word more. "My mistress has had a hard trial to bear, sir. I hope there is no bad news for her in the young lady's letter?"

"On the contrary, there is news that she will be glad to hear—Miss Wyvil is coming here this evening. Will you excuse my asking if Miss Emily has had medical advice?"

"She won't hear of seeing the doctor, sir. He's a good friend of hers—and he lives close by. I am unfortunately alone in the house. If I could leave her, I would go at once and ask his advice."

"Let *me* go!" Mirabel eagerly proposed.

Mrs. Ellmother's face brightened. "That's kindly thought of, sir—if you don't mind the trouble."

"My good lady, nothing is a trouble in your young mistress's service. Give me the doctor's name and address—and tell me what to say to him."

"There's one thing you must be careful of," Mrs. Ellmother answered. "He mustn't come here, as if he had been sent for—she would refuse to see him."

Mirabel understood her. "I will not forget to caution him. Kindly tell Miss Emily I called—my name is Mirabel. I will return to-morrow."

He hastened away on his errand—only to find that he had arrived too late. Doctor Allday had left London; called away to a serious case of illness. He was not expected to get back until late in the afternoon. Mirabel left a message, saying that he would return in the evening.

The next visitor who arrived at the

cottage was the trusty friend, in whose generous nature Mrs. Ellmother had wisely placed confidence. Miss Ladd had resolved to answer the telegram in person, the moment she read it.

“If there is bad news,” she said, “let me hear it at once. I am not well enough to bear suspense; my busy life at the school is beginning to tell on me.”

“There is nothing that need alarm you, ma’am—but there is a great deal to say, before you see Miss Emily. My stupid head turns giddy with thinking of it. I hardly know where to begin.”

“Begin with Emily,” Miss Ladd suggested.

Mrs. Ellmother took the advice. She described Emily’s unexpected arrival on the previous day; and she repeated what had passed between them afterwards. Miss Ladd’s first impulse, when she had recovered her composure, was to go to Emily

without waiting to hear more. Not presuming to stop her, Mrs. Ellmother ventured to put a question. "Do you happen to have my telegram about you, ma'am?" Miss Ladd produced it. "Will you please look at the last part of it again?"

Miss Ladd read the words: "I have something besides to say to you which cannot be put into a letter." She at once returned to her chair.

"Does what you have still to tell me refer to any person whom I know?" she said.

"It refers, ma'am, to Miss de Sor. I am afraid I shall distress you."

"What did I say, when I came in?" Miss Ladd asked. "Speak out plainly; and try—it's not easy, I know---but try to begin at the beginning."

Mrs. Ellmother looked back through her memory of past events, and began by

alluding to the feeling of curiosity which she had excited in Francine, on the day when Emily had made them known to one another. From this she advanced to the narrative of what had taken place at Netherwoods—to the atrocious attempt to frighten her by means of the image of wax—to the discovery made by Francine in the garden at night—and to the circumstances under which that discovery had been communicated to Emily.

Miss Ladd's face reddened with indignation. "Are you sure of all that you have said?" she asked.

"I am quite sure, ma'am. I hope I have not done wrong," Mrs. Ellmother added simply, "in telling you all this?"

"Wrong?" Miss Ladd repeated warmly. "If that wretched girl has no defence to offer, she is a disgrace to my school—and I owe you a debt of gratitude for show-

ing her to me in her true character. She shall return at once to Netherwoods; and she shall answer me to my entire satisfaction—or leave my house. What cruelty! what duplicity! In all my experience of girls, I have never met with the like of it. Let me go to my dear little Emily—and try to forget what I have heard."

Mrs. Ellmother led the good lady to Emily's room—and, returning to the lower part of the house, went out into the garden. The mental effort that she had made had left its result in an aching head, and in an overpowering sense of depression. "A mouthful of fresh air will revive me," she thought.

The front garden and back garden at the cottage communicated with each other. Walking slowly round and round, Mrs. Ellmother heard footsteps on the road outside, which stopped at the gate. She

looked through the grating, and discovered Alban Morris.

“Come in, sir!” she said, rejoiced to see him. He obeyed in silence. The full view of his face shocked Mrs Ellmother. Never, in her experience of the friend who had been so kind to her at Netherwoods, had he looked so old and so haggard as he looked now. “Oh, Mr. Alban, I see how she has distressed you! Don’t take her at her word. Keep a good heart, sir— young girls are never long together of the same mind.”

Alban gave her his hand. “I mustn’t speak about it,” he said. “Silence helps me to bear my misfortune as becomes a man. I have had some hard blows in my time: they don’t seem to have blunted my sense of feeling as I thought they had. Thank God, she doesn’t know how she has made me suffer! I want to ask her par-

don for having forgotten myself yesterday. I spoke roughly to her, at one time. No: I won't intrude on her; I have said I am sorry, in writing. Do you mind giving it to her? Good-bye—and thank you. I mustn't stay longer; Miss Ladd expects me at Netherwoods.”

“Miss Ladd is in the house, sir, at this moment.”

“Here, in London!”

“Upstairs, with Miss Emily.”

“Upstairs? Is Emily ill?”

“She is getting better, sir. Would you like to see Miss Ladd?”

“I should indeed! I have something to say to her—and time is of importance to me. May I wait in the garden?”

“Why not in the parlour, sir?”

“The parlour reminds me of happier days. In time, I may have courage enough to look at the room again. Not now.”

“If she doesn’t make it up with that good man,” Mrs. Ellmother thought, on her way back to the house, “my nurse-child is what I have never believed her to be yet—she’s a fool.”

In half an hour more, Miss Ladd joined Alban on the little plot of grass behind the cottage. “I bring Emily’s reply to your letter,” she said. “Read it, before you speak to me.”

Alban read it: “Don’t suppose you have offended me—and be assured that I feel gratefully the tone in which your note is written. I try to write forbearingly on my side; I wish I could write acceptably as well. It is not to be done. I am as unable as ever to enter into your motives. You are not my relation; you were under no obligation of secresy: you heard me speak ignorantly of the murder of my father, as if it had been the murder of

a stranger; and yet you kept me—deliberately, cruelly kept me—deceived! The remembrance of it burns me like fire. I cannot—oh, Alban, I cannot restore you to the place in my estimation which you have lost! If you wish to help me to bear my trouble, I entreat you not to write to me again."

Alban offered the letter silently to Miss Ladd. She signed to him to keep it.

"I know what Emily has written," she said; "and I have told her, what I now tell you—she is wrong; in every way, wrong. It is the misfortune of her impetuous nature that she rushes to conclusions—and those conclusions once formed, she holds to them with all the strength of her character. In this matter, she has looked at her side of the question exclusively; she is blind to your side."

"Not wilfully!" Alban interposed.

Miss Ladd looked at him with admiration. "You defend Emily?" she said.

"I love her," Alban answered.

Miss Ladd felt for him, as Mrs. Ellmother had felt for him. "Trust to time, Mr. Morris," she resumed. "The danger to be afraid of is—the danger of some headlong action, on her part, in the interval. Who can say what the end may be, if she persists in her present way of thinking? There is something monstrous, in a young girl declaring that it is *her* duty to pursue a murderer, and to bring him to justice! Don't you see it yourself?"

Alban still defended Emily. "It seems to me to be a natural impulse," he said—"natural, and noble."

"Noble!" Miss Ladd exclaimed.

"Yes—for it grows out of the love which has not died with her father's death."

"Then you encourage her?"

"With my whole heart—if she would give me the opportunity!"

"We won't pursue the subject, Mr. Morris. I am told by Mrs. Ellmother that you have something to say to me. What is it?"

"I have to ask you," Alban replied, "to let me resign my situation at Netherwoods."

Miss Ladd was not only surprised; she was also—a very rare thing with her—inclined to be suspicious. After what he had said of Emily, it occurred to her that Alban might be meditating some desperate project, with the hope of recovering his lost place in her favour.

"Have you heard of some better employment?" she asked.

"I have heard of no employment. My mind is not in a state to give the necessary attention to my pupils."

"Is that your only reason for wishing to leave me?"

"It is one of my reasons."

"The only one which you think it necessary to mention?"

"Yes."

"I shall be sorry to lose you, Mr. Morris "

"Believe me, Miss Ladd, I am not ungrateful for your kindness."

"Will you let me, in all kindness, say something more?" Miss Ladd answered. "I don't intrude on your secrets—I only hope that you have no rash project in view."

"I don't understand you, Miss Ladd."

"Yes, Mr. Morris—you do."

She shook hands with him—and went back to Emily.

CHAPTER LI.

THE DOCTOR SEES.

ALBAN returned to Netherwoods—to continue his services, until another master could be found to take his place.

By a later train Miss Ladd followed him. Emily was too well aware of the importance of the mistress's presence to the well-being of the school, to permit her to remain at the cottage. It was understood that they were to correspond, and that Emily's room was waiting for her at Netherwoods, whenever she felt inclined to occupy it.

Mrs. Ellmother made the tea, that evening, earlier than usual. Being alone again

with Emily, it struck her that she might take advantage of her position to say a word in Alban's favour. She had chosen her time unfortunately. The moment she pronounced the name, Emily checked her by a look, and spoke of another person—that person being, Miss Jethro.

Mrs. Ellmother at once entered her protest, in her own downright way. "Whatever you do," she said, "don't go back to that! What does Miss Jethro matter to you?"

"I am more interested in her than you suppose—I happen to know why she left the school."

"Begging your pardon, Miss, that's quite impossible!"

"She left the school," Emily persisted, "for a serious reason. Miss Ladd discovered that she had used false references."

"Good Lord! who told you that?"

"You see I know it. I asked Miss Ladd how she got her information. She was bound by a promise never to mention the person's name. I didn't say it to her—but I may say it to you. I am afraid I have an idea of who the person was."

"No," Mrs. Ellmother obstinately asserted, "you can't possibly know who it was! How should you know?"

"Do you wish me to repeat what I heard in that room opposite, when my aunt was dying?"

"Drop it, Miss Emily! For God's sake, drop it!"

"I can't drop it. It's dreadful to me to have suspicions of my aunt—and no better reason for them than what she said in a state of delirium. Tell me, if you love me, was it her wandering fancy? or was it the truth?"

"As I hope to be saved, Miss Emily,

I can only guess as you do—I don't rightly know. My mistress trusted me half way, as it were. I'm afraid I have a rough tongue of my own sometimes. I offended her—and from that time she kept her own counsel. What she did, she did in the dark, so far as I was concerned."

"How did you offend her?"

"I shall be obliged to speak of your father if I tell you how."

"Speak of him."

"*He* was not to blame—mind that!" Mrs. Ellmother said earnestly. "If I wasn't certain of what I say now, you wouldn't get a word out of me. Good harmless man—there's no denying it—he *was* in love with Miss Jethro! What's the matter?"

Emily was thinking of her memorable conversation with the disgraced teacher on her last night at school. "Nothing," she answered. "Go on."

"If he had not tried to keep it secret from us," Mrs. Ellmother resumed, "your aunt might never have taken it into her head that he was entangled in a love-affair of the shameful sort. I don't deny that I helped her in her inquiries; but it was only because I felt sure, from the first, that the more she discovered, the more certainly my master's innocence would show itself. He used to go away, and visit Miss Jethro privately. In the time when your aunt trusted me, we never could find out where. She made that discovery afterwards for herself (I can't tell you how long afterwards); and she spent money in employing mean wretches to pry into Miss Jethro's past life. She had (if you will excuse me for saying it) an old maid's hatred of the handsome young woman, who lured your father away from home, and set up a secret (in a manner

of speaking) between her brother and herself. I won't tell you how we looked at letters and other things which he forgot to leave under lock and key. I will only say there was one bit, in a journal he kept, which made me ashamed of myself. I read it out to Miss Letitia: and I told her, in so many words, not to count any more on me. No; I haven't got a copy of the words—I can remember them without a copy. 'Even if my religion did not forbid me to peril my soul by leading a life of sin with this woman whom I love'—that was how it began—'the thought of my daughter would keep me pure. No conduct of mine shall ever make me unworthy of my child's affection and respect.' There! I'm making you cry; I won't stay here any longer. All that I had to say has been said. Nobody but Miss Ladd knows for certain whether your aunt was

innocent or guilty in the matter of Miss Jethro's disgrace. Please to excuse me; my work's waiting downstairs."

From time to time, as she pursued her domestic labours, Mrs. Ellmother thought of Mirabel. Hours on hours had passed—and the doctor had not appeared. Was he too busy to spare even a few minutes of his time? Or had the handsome little gentleman, after promising so fairly, failed to perform his errand? This last doubt wronged Mirabel. He had engaged to return to the doctor's house; and he kept his word.

Doctor Allday was at home again, and was seeing patients. Introduced in his turn, Mirabel had no reason to complain of his reception. At the same time, after he had stated the object of his visit, something odd began to show itself in the doctor's manner.

He looked at Mirabel with an appearance of uneasy curiosity; and he contrived an excuse for altering the visitor's position in the room, so that the light fell full on Mirabel's face.

"I fancy I must have seen you," the doctor said, "at some former time."

"I am ashamed to say I don't remember it," Mirabel answered.

"Ah, very likely I'm wrong! I'll call on Miss Emily, sir, you may depend on it."

Left in his consulting-room, Doctor All-day failed to ring the bell which summoned the next patient who was waiting for him. He took his diary from the table drawer, and turned to the daily entries for the past month of July.

Arriving at the fifteenth day of the month, he glanced at the first lines of writing: "A visit from a mysterious lady,

calling herself Miss Jethro. Our conference led to some very unexpected results."

No: that was not what he was in search of. He looked a little lower down; and read on regularly, from that point, as follows:

"Called on Miss Emily, in great anxiety about the discoveries which she might make among her aunt's papers. Papers all destroyed, thank God—except the Handbill, offering a reward for discovery of the murderer, which she found in the scrap-book. Gave her back the Handbill. Emily much surprised that the wretch should have escaped, with such a careful description of him circulated everywhere. She read the description aloud to me, in her nice clear voice: 'Supposed age between twenty-five and thirty years. A well-made man of small stature. Fair complexion, delicate features, clear blue eyes. Hair light, and cut rather short. Clean shaven,

with the exception of narrow half whiskers'—and so on. Emily at a loss to understand how the fugitive could disguise himself. Reminded her that he could effectually disguise his head and face (with time to help him) by letting his hair grow long, and cultivating his beard. Emily not convinced, even by this self-evident view of the case. Changed the subject."

The doctor put away his diary, and rang the bell.

"Curious," he thought. "That dandyfied little clergyman has certainly reminded me of my discussion with Emily, more than two months since. Was it his flowing hair, I wonder? or his splendid beard? Good God! suppose it should turn out——?"

He was interrupted by the appearance of his patient. Other ailing people followed. Doctor Allday's mind was professionally occupied for the rest of the evening.

CHAPTER LII.

“IF I COULD FIND A FRIEND!”

SHORTLY after Miss Ladd had taken her departure, a parcel arrived for Emily, bearing the name of a bookseller printed on the label. It was large, and it was heavy. “Reading enough, I should think, to last for a life-time,” Mrs. Ellmother remarked, after carrying the parcel upstairs.

Emily called her back as she was leaving the room. “I want to caution you,” she said, “before Miss Wyvil comes. Don’t tell her—don’t tell anybody—how my father met his death. If other persons are taken into our confidence, they will talk of it. We don’t know how near to us the mur-

derer may be. The slightest hint may put him on his guard."

"Oh, Miss, are you still thinking of that!"

"I think of nothing else."

"Bad for your mind, Miss Emily—and bad for your body, as your looks show. I wish you would take counsel with some discreet person, before you move in this matter by yourself."

Emily sighed wearily. "In my situation, where is the person whom I can trust?"

"You can trust the good doctor."

"Can I? Perhaps I was wrong when I told you I wouldn't see him. He might be of some use to me."

Mrs. Ellmother made the most of this concession, in the fear that Emily might change her mind. "Doctor Allday may call on you to-morrow," she said.

"Do you mean that you have sent for him?"

"Don't be angry! I did it for the best—and Mr. Mirabel agreed with me."

"Mr. Mirabel! What have you told Mr. Mirabel?"

"Nothing, except that you are ill. When he heard that, he proposed to go to the doctor. He will be here again to-morrow, to ask for news of your health. Will you see him?"

"I don't know yet—I have other things to think of. Bring Miss Wyvil up here, when she comes."

"Am I to get the spare room ready for her?"

"No. She is staying with her father at the London house."

Emily made that reply almost with an air of relief. When Cecilia arrived, it was only by an effort that she could show grateful appreciation of the sympathy of her dearest friend. When the visit came to an end, she

felt an ungrateful sense of freedom: the restraint was off her mind; she could think again of the one terrible subject that had any interest for her now. Over love, over friendship, over the natural enjoyment of her young life, predominated the blighting resolution which bound her to avenge her father's death. Her dearest remembrances of him—tender remembrances once—now burnt in her (to use her own words) like fire. It was no ordinary love that had bound parent and child together in the bygone time. Emily had grown from infancy to girlhood, owing all the brightness of her life—a life without a mother, without brothers, without sisters—to her father alone. To submit to lose this beloved, this only companion, by the cruel stroke of disease was of all trials of resignation the hardest to bear. But to be severed from him by the murderous hand of a man, was more than Emily's fervent

nature could passively endure. Before the garden gate had closed on her friend she had returned to her one thought, she was breathing again her one aspiration. The books that she had ordered, with her own purpose in view—books that might supply her want of experience, and might reveal the perils which beset the course that lay before her—were unpacked and spread out on the table. Hour after hour, when the old servant believed that her mistress was in bed, she was absorbed over biographies in English and French, which related the stratagems by means of which famous policemen had captured the worst criminals of their time. From these, she turned to works of fiction, which found their chief topic of interest in dwelling on the discovery of hidden crime. The night passed, and dawn glimmered through the window—and still she opened book after book with sinking

courage—and still she gained nothing but the disheartening conviction of her inability to carry out her own plans. Almost every page that she turned over revealed the immovable obstacles set in her way by her sex and her age. Could *she* mix with the people, or visit the scenes, familiar to the experience of men (in fact and in fiction), who had traced the homicide to his hiding-place, and had marked him among his harmless fellow-creatures with the brand of Cain? No! A young girl following, or attempting to follow, that career, must reckon with insult and outrage—paying their abominable tribute to her youth and her beauty, at every turn. What proportion would the men who might respect her bear to the men who might make her the object of advances, which it was hardly possible to imagine without shuddering. She crept exhausted to her bed, the most helpless hopeless creature

on the wide surface of the earth—a girl self-devoted to the task of a man.

Careful to perform his promise to Mirabel, without delay, the doctor called on Emily early in the morning—before the hour at which he usually entered his consulting room.

“Well? What’s the matter with the pretty young mistress?” he asked, in his most abrupt manner, when Mrs. Ellmother opened the door. “Is it love? or jealousy? or a new dress with a wrinkle in it?”

“You will hear about it, sir, from Miss Emily herself. I am forbidden to say, anything.”

“But you mean to say something—for all that?”

“Don’t joke, Doctor Allday! The state of things here is a great deal too serious

for joking. Make up your mind to be surprised—I say no more."

Before the doctor could ask what this meant, Emily opened the parlour door. "Come in!" she said, impatiently.

Doctor Allday's first greeting was strictly professional. "My dear child, I never expected this," he began. "You are looking wretchedly ill." He attempted to feel her pulse. She drew her hand away from him.

"It's my mind that's ill," she answered. "Feeling my pulse won't cure me of anxiety and distress. I want advice; I want help. Dear old Doctor, you have always been a good friend to me—be a better friend than ever now."

"What can I do?"

"Promise you will keep secret what I am going to say to you—and listen, pray listen patiently, till I have done."

Doctor Allday promised, and listened.

He had been, in some degree at least, prepared for a surprise—but the disclosure which now burst on him was more than his equanimity could sustain. He looked at Emily in silent dismay. She had surprised and shocked him, not only by what she said, but by what she unconsciously suggested. Was it possible that Mirabel’s personal appearance had produced on her the same impression which was present in his own mind? His first impulse, when he was composed enough to speak, urged him to put the question cautiously.

“If you happened to meet with the suspected man,” he said, “have you any means of identifying him?”

“None whatever, doctor. If you would only think it over——”

He stopped her there; convinced of the danger of encouraging her, and resolved to act on his conviction.

"I have enough to occupy me in my profession," he said. "Ask your other friend to think it over."

"What other friend?"

"Mr. Alban Morris."

The moment he pronounced the name, he saw that he had touched on some painful association. "Has Mr. Morris refused to help you?" he inquired.

"I have not asked him to help me."

"Why?"

There was no choice (with such a man as Doctor Allday) between offending him or answering him. Emily adopted the last alternative. On this occasion she had no reason to complain of his silence.

"Your view of Mr. Morris's conduct surprises me," he replied—"surprises me more than I can say," he added; remembering that he too was guilty of having kept her in ignorance of the truth, out of regard—

mistaken regard, as it now seemed to be—for her peace of mind.

"Be good to me, and pass it over if I am wrong," Emily said: "I can't dispute with you; I can only tell you what I feel. You have always been kind to me—may I count on your kindness still?"

Doctor Allday relapsed into silence.

"May I at least ask," she went on, "if you know anything of persons——" She paused, discouraged by the cold expression of inquiry in the old man's eyes as he looked at her.

"What persons?" he said.

"Persons whom I suspect."

"Name them."

Emily named the landlady of the inn at Zeeland: she could now place the right interpretation on Mrs. Rook's conduct, when the locket had been put into her hand at Netherwoods. Doctor Allday answered

shortly and stiffly: he had never even seen Mrs. Rook. Emily mentioned Miss Jethro next—and saw at once that she had interested him.

"What do you suspect Miss Jethro of doing?" he asked

"I suspect her of knowing more of my father's death than she is willing to acknowledge," Emily replied.

The doctor's manner altered for the better. "I agree with you," he said frankly. "But I have some knowledge of that lady. I warn you not to waste time and trouble in trying to discover the weak side of Miss Jethro."

"That was not my experience of her at school," Emily rejoined. "At the same time, I don't know what may have happened since those days. I may perhaps have lost the place I once held in her regard."

"How?"

"Through my aunt."

"Through your aunt?"

"I hope and trust I am wrong," Emily continued; "but I fear my aunt had something to do with Miss Jethro's dismissal from the school—and in that case Miss Jethro may have found it out." Her eyes, resting on the doctor, suddenly brightened. "You know something about it!" she exclaimed.

He considered a little—whether he should or should not tell her of the letter addressed by Miss Ladd to Miss Letitia, which he had found at the cottage.

"If I could satisfy you that your fears are well founded," he asked, "would the discovery keep you away from Miss Jethro?"

"I should be ashamed to speak to her—even if we met."

"Very well. I can tell you positively, that your aunt was the person who turned Miss Jethro out of the school. When I get home, I will send you a letter that proves it."

Emily's head sank on her breast. "Why do I only hear of this now?" she said.

"Because I had no reason for letting you know of it, before to-day. If I have done nothing else, I have at least succeeded in keeping you and Miss Jethro apart."

Emily looked at him in alarm. He went on without appearing to notice that he had startled her. "I wish to God I could as easily put a stop to the mad project which you are contemplating."

"The mad project?" Emily repeated. "Oh, Doctor Allday. Do you cruelly leave me to myself, at the time of all others, when I am most in need of your sympathy?"

That appeal moved him. He spoke more gently; he pitied, while he condemned her.

"My poor dear child, I should be cruel indeed, if I encouraged you. You are giving yourself up to an enterprise, so shockingly unsuited to a young girl like you, that I declare I contemplate it with horror. Think, I entreat you, think; and let me hear that you have yielded—not to my poor entreaties—but to your own better sense!" His voice faltered; his eyes moistened. "I shall make a fool of myself," he burst out furiously, "if I stay here any longer. Good-bye."

He left her.

She walked to the window, and looked out at the fair morning. No one to feel for her—no one to understand her—nothing nearer that could speak to poor mortality of hope and encouragement than the bright

heaven, so far away! She turned from the window. "The sun shines on the murderer," she thought, "as it shines on me."

She sat down at the table, and tried to quiet her mind; to think steadily to some good purpose. Of the few friends that she possessed, every one had declared that she was in the wrong. Had *they* lost the one loved being of all beings on earth, and lost him by the hand of a homicide—and that homicide free? All that was faithful, all that was devoted in the girl's nature, held her to her desperate resolution as with a hand of iron. If she shrank at that miserable moment, it was not from her design—it was from the sense of her own helplessness. "Oh, if I had been a man!" she said to herself. "Oh, if I could find a friend!"

CHAPTER LIII.

THE FRIEND IS FOUND.

MRS. ELLMOTHER looked into the parlour. "I told you Mr. Mirabel would call again," she announced. "Here he is."

"Has he asked to see me?"

"He leaves it entirely to you."

For a moment, and a moment only, Emily was undecided. "Show him in," she said.

Mirabel's embarrassment was visible the moment he entered the room. For the first time in his life—in the presence of a woman—the popular preacher was shy. He who had taken hundreds of fair hands with sympathetic pressure—he who had offered fluent consolation, abroad and at home, to

beauty in distress—was conscious of a rising colour, and was absolutely at a loss for words, when Emily received him. And yet, though he appeared at disadvantage—and, worse still, though he was aware of it himself—there was nothing contemptible in his look and manner. His silence and confusion revealed a change in him which inspired respect. Love had developed this spoilt darling of foolish congregations, this effeminate pet of drawing-rooms and boudoirs, into the likeness of a Man—and no woman, in Emily's position, could have failed to see that it was love which she herself had inspired.

Equally ill at ease, they both took refuge in the commonplace phrases suggested by the occasion. These exhausted, there was a pause. Mirabel alluded to Cecilia, as a means of continuing the conversation.

“Have you seen Miss Wyvil?” he inquired.

"She was here last night; and I expect to see her again to-day, before she returns to Monksmoor with her father. Do you go back with them?"

"Yes—if *you* do."

"I remain in London."

"Then I remain in London, too."

The strong feeling that was in him had forced its way to expression at last. In happier days — when she had persistently refused to let him speak to her seriously — she would have been ready with a light-hearted reply. She was silent now. Mirabel pleaded with her not to misunderstand him, by an honest confession of his motives which presented him under a new aspect. The easy plausible man, who had hardly ever seemed to be in earnest before — meant, seriously meant, what he said now.

"May I try to explain myself?" he asked.

“Certainly, if you wish it.”

“Pray, don’t suppose me capable,” Mirabel said earnestly, “of presuming to pay you an idle compliment. I cannot think of you, alone and in trouble, without feeling anxiety which can only be relieved in one way—I must be near enough to hear of you, day by day. Not by repeating this visit! Unless you wish it, I will not again cross the threshold of your door. Mrs. Ellmother will tell me if your mind is more at ease; Mrs. Ellmother will tell me if there is any new trial of your fortitude. She needn’t even mention that I have been speaking to her at the door; and she may be sure, and you may be sure, that I shall ask no inquisitive questions. I can feel for you in your misfortune, without wishing to know what that misfortune is. If I can ever be of the smallest use, think of me as your

other servant. Say to Mrs. Ellmother, 'I want him'—and say no more."

Where is the woman who could have resisted such devotion as this — inspired, truly inspired, by herself? Emily's eyes softened as she answered him.

"You little know how your kindness touches me," she said.

"Don't speak of my kindness until you have put me to the proof," he interposed. "Can a friend (such a friend as I am, I mean) be of any use?"

"Of the greatest use if I could feel justified in trying you."

"I entreat you to try me!"

"But, Mr. Mirabel, you don't know what I am thinking of."

"I don't want to know."

"I may be wrong. My friends all say I *am* wrong."

"I don't care what your friends say ;

I don't care about any earthly thing but your tranquillity. Does your dog ask whether you are right or wrong? I am your dog. I think of You, and I think of nothing else."

She looked back through the experience of the last few days. Miss Ladd—Mrs. Ellmother—Doctor Allday: not one of them had felt for her, not one of them had spoken to her, as this man had felt and had spoken. She remembered the dreadful sense of solitude and helplessness which had wrung her heart, in the interval before Mirabel came in. Her father himself could hardly have been kinder to her than this friend of a few weeks only. She looked at him through her tears; she could say nothing that was eloquent, nothing even that was adequate. "You are very good to me," was her only acknowledgment of all that he had

offered. How poor it seemed to be! and yet how much it meant!

He rose—saying considerably that he would leave her to recover herself, and would wait to hear if he was wanted.

"No," she said; "I must not let you go. In common gratitude, I ought to decide before you leave me, and I do decide to take you into my confidence." She hesitated; her colour rose a little. "I know how unselfishly you offer me your help," she resumed; "I know you speak to me as a brother might speak to a sister——"

He gently interrupted her. "No," he said; "I can't honestly claim to do that. And—may I venture to remind you?—you know why."

She started. Her eyes rested on him with a momentary expression of reproach.

"Is it quite fair," she asked, "in my situation, to say that?"

“Would it have been quite fair,” he rejoined, “to allow you to deceive yourself? Should I deserve to be taken into your confidence, if I encouraged you to trust me, under false pretences? Not a word more of those hopes on which the happiness of my life depends shall pass my lips, unless you permit it. In my devotion to your interests, I promise to forget myself. My motives may be misinterpreted; my position may be misunderstood. Ignorant people may take me for that other happier man, who is an object of interest to you——”

“Stop, Mr. Mirabel! The person to whom you refer has no such claim on me as you suppose.”

“Dare I say how happy I am to hear it? Will you forgive me?”

“I will forgive you, if you say no more.”

Their eyes met. Completely overcome by the new hope that she had inspired, Mirabel was unable to answer her. His sensitive nerves trembled under emotion, like the nerves of a woman; his delicate complexion faded away slowly into whiteness. Emily was alarmed—he seemed to be on the point of fainting. She ran to the window to open it more widely.

"Pray don't trouble yourself," he said, "I am easily agitated by any sudden sensation—and I am a little overcome at this moment by my own happiness."

"Let me give you a glass of wine."

"Thank you—I don't need it indeed."

"You really feel better?"

"I feel quite well again—and eager to hear how I can serve you."

"It's a long story, Mr. Mirabel—and a dreadful story."

"Dreadful?"

“Yes! Let me tell you first how you can serve me. I am in search of a man who has done me the cruellest wrong that one human creature can inflict on another. But the chances are all against me—I am only a woman; and I don’t know how to take even the first step towards discovery.”

“You will know, when I guide you.”

He reminded her tenderly of what she might expect from him, and was rewarded by a grateful look. Seeing nothing, suspecting nothing, they advanced together nearer and nearer to the end.

“Once or twice,” Emily continued, “I spoke to you of my poor father, when we were at Monksmoor—and I must speak of him again. You could have no interest in inquiring about a stranger—and you cannot have heard how he died.”

“Pardon me, I heard from Mr. Wyvil how he died.”

“ You heard what I had told Mr. Wyvil,” Emily said ; “ I was wrong.”

“ Wrong !” Mirabel exclaimed, in a tone of courteous surprise. “ Was it not a sudden death ? ”

“ It *was* a sudden death.”

“ Caused by disease of the heart ? ”

“ Caused by no disease. I have been deceived about my father’s death—and I have only discovered it a few days since.”

At the impending moment of the frightful shock which she was innocently about to inflict on him, she stopped—doubtful whether it would be best to relate how the discovery had been made, or to pass at once to the result. Mirabel supposed that she had paused to control her agitation. He was so immeasurably far away from the faintest suspicion of what was coming that he exerted his ingenuity, in the hope of sparing her.

“I can anticipate the rest,” he said. “Your sad loss has been caused by some fatal accident. Let us change the subject; tell me more of that man whom I must help you to find. It will only distress you to dwell on your father’s death.”

“Distress me?” she repeated. “His death maddens me!”

“Oh, don’t say that!”

“Hear me! hear me! My father died murdered, at Zeeland — and the man you must help me to find is the wretch who killed him.”

She started to her feet with a cry of terror. Mirabel dropped from his chair senseless on the floor.

CHAPTER LIV.

THE END OF THE FAINTING FIT.

EMILY recovered her presence of mind. She opened the door, so as to make a draught of air in the room, and called for water. Returning to Mirabel, she loosened his cravat. Mrs. Ellmother came in, just in time to prevent her from committing a common error in the treatment of fainting persons, by raising Mirabel's head. The current of air, and the sprinkling of water over his face, soon produced their customary effect. "He'll come round, directly," Mrs. Ellmother remarked. "Your aunt was sometimes taken with these swoons, Miss; and I know something

about them. He looks a poor weak creature, in spite of his big beard. Has anything frightened him?"

Emily little knew how correctly that chance guess had hit on the truth!

"Nothing can possibly have frightened him," she replied; "I am afraid he is in bad health. He turned suddenly pale while we were talking; and I thought he was going to be taken ill; he made light of it, and seemed to recover. Unfortunately, I was right; it was the threatening of a fainting fit—he dropped on the floor a minute afterwards."

A sigh fluttered over Mirabel's lips. His eyes opened, looked at Mrs. Ellmother in vacant terror, and closed again. Emily whispered to her to leave the room. The old woman smiled satirically as she opened the door—then looked back, with a sudden change of humour. To see the kind

young mistress bending over the feeble little clergyman set her—by some strange association of ideas—thinking of Alban Morris. “Ah,” she muttered to herself, on her way out, “I call *him* a Man!”

There was wine in the sideboard—the wine which Emily had once already offered in vain. Mirabel drank it eagerly, this time. He looked round the room, as if he wished to be sure that they were alone. “Have I fallen to a low place in your estimation?” he asked, smiling faintly. “I am afraid you will think poorly enough of your new ally, after this?”

“I only think you should take more care of your health,” Emily replied, with sincere interest in his recovery. “Let me leave you to rest on the sofa.”

He refused to remain at the cottage—he asked, with a sudden change to fretfulness, if she would let her servant get

him a cab. She ventured to doubt whether he was quite strong enough yet to go away by himself. He reiterated, piteously reiterated, his request. A passing cab was stopped directly. Emily accompanied him to the gate. "I know what to do," he said, in a hurried absent way. "Rest and a little tonic medicine will soon set me right." The clammy coldness of his skin made Emily shudder as they shook hands. "You won't think the worse of me for this?" he asked.

"How can you imagine such a thing!" she answered warmly.

"Will you see me, if I come to-morrow?"

"I shall be anxious to see you."

So they parted. Emily returned to the house, pitying him with all her heart.

Book the Sixth:
HERE AND THERE.

BOOK THE SIXTH:

Here and There.

CHAPTER LV.

MIRABEL SEES HIS WAY.

REACHING the hotel at which he was accustomed to stay when he was in London, Mirabel locked the door of his room. He looked at the houses on the opposite side of the street. His mind was in such a state of morbid distrust that he lowered the blind over the window. In solitude and obscurity, the miserable wretch sat down in a corner, and covered his face with his hands, and tried to realise what had happened to him.

Nothing had been said, at the fatal

interview with Emily, which could have given him the slightest warning of what was to come. Her father's name—absolutely unknown to him when he fled from the inn—had only been communicated to the public by the newspaper reports of the adjourned inquest. At the time when those reports appeared, he was in hiding, under circumstances which prevented him from seeing a newspaper. While the murder was still a subject of conversation, he was in France—far out of the track of English travellers—and he remained on the continent until the summer of eighteen hundred and eighty-one. No exercise of discretion, on his part, could have extricated him from the terrible position in which he was now placed. He stood pledged to Emily to discover the man suspected of the murder of her father; and that man was—himself!

What refuge was left open to him?

If he took to flight, his sudden disappearance would be a suspicious circumstance in itself, and would therefore provoke inquiries which might lead to serious results. Supposing that he overlooked the risk thus presented, would he be capable of enduring a separation from Emily, which might be a separation for life? Even in the first horror of discovering his situation, her influence remained unshaken—the animating spirit of the one manly capacity for resistance which raised him above the reach of his own fears. The only prospect before him which he felt himself to be incapable of contemplating, was the prospect of leaving Emily.

Having arrived at this conclusion, his fears urged him to think of providing for his own safety.

The first precaution to adopt was to

separate Emily from friends whose advice might be hostile to his interests—perhaps even subversive of his security. To effect this design, he had need of an ally whom he could trust. That ally was at his disposal, far away in the north.

At the time when Francine's jealousy began to interfere with all freedom of intercourse between Emily and himself, at Monksmoor, he had contemplated making arrangements which might enable them to meet at the house of his invalid sister, Mrs. Delvin. He had spoken of her, and of the bodily affliction which confined her to her room, in terms which had already interested Emily. In the present emergency, he decided on returning to the subject, and on hastening the meeting between the two women which he had first suggested at Mr. Wyvil's country seat.

No time was to be lost in carrying out

this intention. He wrote to Mrs. Delvin by that day's post; confiding to her, in the first place, the critical position in which he now found himself. This done, he proceeded as follows:

“To your sound judgment, dearest Agatha, it may appear that I am making myself needlessly uneasy about the future. Two persons only know that I am the man who escaped from the inn at Zeeland. You are one of them, and Miss Jethro is the other. On you I can absolutely rely; and, after my experience of her, I ought to feel sure of Miss Jethro. I admit this; but I cannot get over my distrust of Emily's friends. I fear the cunning old doctor; I doubt Mr. Wyvil; I hate Alban Morris.

“Do me a favour, my dear. Invite Emily to be your guest, and so separate her from these friends. The old servant who attends on her will be included in the in-

vation, of course. Mrs. Ellmother is, as I believe, devoted to the interests of Mr. Alban Morris: she will be well out of the way of doing mischief, while we have her safe in your northern solitude.

"There is no fear that Emily will refuse your invitation.

"In the first place, she is already interested in you. In the second place, I shall consider the small proprieties of social life; and, instead of travelling with her to your house, I shall follow by a later train. In the third place, I am now the chosen adviser in whom she trusts; and what I tell her to do, she will do. It pains me, really and truly pains me, to be compelled to deceive her—but the other alternative is to reveal myself as the wretch of whom she is in search. Was there ever such a situation? And, oh Agatha, I am so fond of her! If I fail

to persuade her to be my wife, I don't care what becomes of me. I used to think disgrace, and death on the scaffold, the most frightful prospect that a man can contemplate. In my present frame of mind, a life without Emily may just as well end in that way as in any other. When we are together in your old sea-beaten tower, do your best, my dear, to incline the heart of this sweet girl towards me. If she remains in London, how do I know that Mr. Morris may not recover the place he has lost in her good opinion? The bare idea of it turns me cold.

“There is one more point on which I must touch, before I can finish my letter.

“When you last wrote, you told me that Sir Jervis Redwood was not expected to live much longer, and that the establishment would be broken up after his death. Can you find out for me what will

become, under these circumstances, of Mr. and Mrs. Rook? So far as I am concerned, I don't doubt that the alteration in my personal appearance, which has protected me for years past, may be trusted to preserve me from recognition by these two people. But it is of the utmost importance, remembering the project to which Emily has devoted herself, that she should not meet with Mrs. Rook. They have been already in correspondence; and Mrs. Rook has expressed an intention (if the opportunity offers itself) of calling at the cottage. Another reason, and a pressing reason, for removing Emily from London! We can easily keep the Rooks out of *your* house; but I own I should feel more at my ease, if I heard that they had left Northumberland."

With that confession, Mrs. Delvin's brother closed his letter.

CHAPTER LVI.

ALBAN SEES HIS WAY.

DURING the first days of Mirabel's sojourn at his hotel in London, events were in progress at Netherwoods, affecting the interests of the man who was the especial object of his distrust. Not long after Miss Ladd had returned to her school, she heard of an artist who was capable of filling the place to be vacated by Alban Morris. It was then the twenty-third of the month. In four days more the new master would be ready to enter on his duties; and Alban would be at liberty.

On the twenty-fourth, Alban received a telegram which startled him. The person

sending the message was Mrs. Ellmother ; and the words were : "Meet me at your railway station to-day, at two o'clock."

He found the old woman in the waiting-room ; and he met with a rough reception.

"Minutes are precious, Mr. Morris," she said ; "you are two minutes late. The next train to London stops here in half an hour—and I must go back by it."

"Good heavens, what brings you here ? Is Emily——?"

"Emily is well enough in health—if that's what you mean ? As to why I come here, the reason is that it's a deal easier for me (worse luck !) to take this journey than to write a letter. One good turn deserves another. I don't forget how kind you were to me, away there at the school—and I can't, and won't, see what's going on at the cottage, behind your back, without letting you know of it. Oh, you

needn't be alarmed about *her*! I've made an excuse to get away for a few hours—but I haven't left her by herself. Miss Wyvil has come to London again; and Mr. Mirabel spends the best part of his time with her. Excuse me for a moment, will you? I'm so thirsty after the journey, I can hardly speak."

She presented herself at the counter in the waiting-room. "I'll trouble you, young woman, for a glass of ale." She returned to Alban in a better humour. "It's not bad stuff, that! When I have said my say, I'll have a drop more—just to wash the taste of Mr. Mirabel out of my mouth. Wait a bit; I have something to ask you. How much longer are you obliged to stop here, teaching the girls to draw?"

"I leave Netherwoods in three days more," Alban replied.

"That's all right! You may be in time

to bring Miss Emily to her senses, yet.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean—if you don’t stop it—she will marry the parson.”

“I can’t believe it, Mrs. Ellmother! I won’t believe it!”

“Ah, it’s a comfort to him, poor fellow, to say that! Look here, Mr. Morris; this is how it stands. You’re in disgrace with Miss Emily—and he profits by it. I was fool enough to take a liking to Mr. Mirabel when I first opened the door to him; I know better now. He got on the blind side of me; and now he has got on the blind side of *her*. Shall I tell you how? By doing what you would have done if you had had the chance. He’s helping her—or pretending to help her, I don’t know which—to find the man who murdered poor Mr. Brown. After four years! And

when all the police in England (with a reward to encourage them) did their best, and it came to nothing!"

"Never mind that!" Alban said impatiently. "I want to know how Mr. Mirabel is helping her."

"That's more than I can tell you. You don't suppose they take me into their confidence? All I can do is to pick up a word, here and there, when fine weather tempts them out into the garden. She tells him to suspect Mrs. Rook, and to make inquiries after Miss Jethro. And he has his plans; and he writes them down, which is dead against his doing anything useful, in my opinion. I don't hold with your scribblers. At the same time I wouldn't count too positively, in your place, on his being likely to fail. That little Mirabel—if it wasn't for his beard, I should believe he was a woman, and a

sickly woman too; he fainted in our house the other day—that little Mirabel is in earnest. Rather than leave Miss Emily from Saturday to Monday, he has got a parson out of employment to do his Sunday work for him. And, what's more, he has persuaded her (for some reasons of his own) to leave London next week."

"Is she going back to Monksmoor?"

"Not she! Mr. Mirabel has got a sister, a widow lady; she's a cripple, or something of the sort. Her name is Mrs. Delvin. She lives far away in the north country, by the sea; and Miss Emily is going to stay with her."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Sure? I've seen the letter."

"Do you mean the letter of invitation?"

"Yes—I do. Miss Emily herself showed it to me. I'm to go with her—'in attendance on my mistress,' as the lady puts

it. This I will say for Mrs. Delvin: her handwriting is a credit to the school that taught her; and the poor bedridden creature words her invitation so nicely, that I myself couldn't have resisted it—and I'm a hard one as you know. You don't seem to heed me, Mr. Morris."

"I beg your pardon, I was thinking."

"Thinking of what—if I may make so bold?"

"Of going back to London with you, instead of waiting till the new master comes to take my place."

"Don't do that, sir! You would do harm instead of good, if you showed yourself at the cottage now. Besides, it would not be fair to Miss Ladd, to leave her before the other man takes your girls off your hands. Trust me to look after your interests; and don't go near Miss Emily—don't even write to her—unless you have got something to say about the murder,

which she will be eager to hear. Make some discovery in that direction, Mr. Morris, while the parson is only trying to do it or pretending to do it—and I'll answer for the result. Look at the clock! In ten minutes more the train will be here. My memory isn't as good as it was; but I do think I have told you all I had to tell."

"You are the best of good friends!" Alban said, warmly.

"Never mind about that, sir. If you want to do a friendly thing in return, tell me if you know what has become of Miss de Sor."

"She has returned to Netherwoods."

"Aha! Miss Ladd is as good as her word. Would you mind writing to tell me of it, if Miss de Sor leaves the school again? Good Lord! there she is on the platform, with bag and baggage. Don't

let her see me, Mr. Morris! If she comes in here, I shall set the marks of my ten finger-nails on that false face of hers, as sure as I am a Christian woman."

Alban placed himself at the door, so as to hide Mrs. Ellmother. There indeed was Francine, accompanied by one of the teachers at the school. She took a seat on the bench outside the booking-office, in a state of sullen indifference—absorbed in herself—noticing nothing. Urged by ungovernable curiosity, Mrs. Ellmother stole on tiptoe to Alban's side to look at her. To a person acquainted with the circumstances there could be no possible doubt of what had happened. Francine had failed to excuse herself, and had been dismissed from Miss Ladd's house.

"I would have travelled to the world's end," Mrs. Ellmother said, "to see *that!*"

She returned to her place in the waiting room, perfectly satisfied.

The teacher noticed Alban, on leaving the booking-office after taking the tickets. "I shall be glad," she said, looking towards Francine, "when I have resigned the charge of that young lady to the person who is to receive her in London."

"Is she to be sent back to her parents?" Alban asked.

"We don't know yet. Miss Ladd will write to San Domingo by the next mail. In the meantime, her father's agent in London—the same person who pays her allowance—takes care of her until he hears from the West Indies."

"Does she consent to this?"

"She doesn't seem to care what becomes of her. Miss Ladd has given her every opportunity of explaining and excusing herself, and has produced no

impression. You can see the state she is in. Our good mistress—always hopeful even in the worst cases, as you know—thinks she is feeling ashamed of herself, and is too proud and self-willed to own it. My own idea is, that some secret disappointment is weighing on her mind. Perhaps I am wrong.”

No. Miss Ladd was wrong; and the teacher was right.

The passion of revenge, being essentially selfish in its nature, is of all passions the narrowest in its range of view. In gratifying her jealous hatred of Emily, Francine had correctly foreseen consequences, as they might affect the other object of her enmity—Alban Morris. But she had failed to perceive the imminent danger of another result, which in a calmer frame of mind might not have escaped discovery. In triumphing over Emily and Alban, she

had been the indirect means of inflicting on herself the bitterest of all disappointments—she had brought Emily and Mirabel together. The first forewarning of this catastrophe had reached her, on hearing that Mirabel would not return to Monks-moor. Her worst fears had been thereafter confirmed by a letter from Cecilia, which had followed her to Netherwoods. From that moment, she, who had made others wretched, paid the penalty in suffering as keen as any that she had inflicted. Completely prostrated; powerless, through ignorance of his address in London, to make a last appeal to Mirabel; she was literally, as had just been said, careless what became of her. When the train approached, she sprang to her feet—advanced to the edge of the platform—and suddenly drew back, shuddering. The teacher looked in terror at Alban. Had

the desperate girl meditated throwing herself under the wheels of the engine? The thought had been in both their minds; but neither of them acknowledged it. Francine stepped quietly into the carriage, when the train drew up, and laid her head back in a corner, and closed her eyes. Mrs. Ellmother took her place in another compartment, and beckoned to Alban to speak to her at the window.

“Where can I see you, when you go to London?” she asked.

“At Doctor Allday’s house.”

“On what day?”

“On Tuesday next.”

CHAPTER LVII.

APPROACHING THE END.

ALBAN reached London early enough in the afternoon to find the doctor at his luncheon. "Too late to see Mrs. Ellmother," he announced. "Sit down and have something to eat."

"Has she left any message for me?"

"A message, my good friend, that you won't like to hear. She is off with her mistress, this morning, on a visit to Mr. Mirabel's sister."

"Does he go with them?"

"No; he follows by a later train."

"Has Mrs. Ellmother mentioned the address?"

“There it is, in her own handwriting.”

Alban read the address:—“Mrs. Delvin, The Clink, Belford, Northumberland.”

“Turn to the back of that bit of paper,” the doctor said. “Mrs. Ellmother has written something on it.”

She had written these words: “No discoveries made by Mr. Mirabel, up to this time. Sir Jervis Redwood is dead. The Rooks are believed to be in Scotland; and Miss Emily, if need be, is to help the parson to find them. No news of Miss Jethro.”

“Now you have got your information,” Doctor Allday resumed, “let me have a look at you. You’re not in a rage: that’s a good sign to begin with.”

“I am not the less determined,” Alban answered.

“To bring Emily to her senses?” the doctor asked.

“To do what Mirabel has *not* done—and then to let her choose between us.”

“Aye? aye? Your good opinion of her hasn’t altered, though she has treated you so badly?”

“My good opinion makes allowance for the state of my poor darling’s mind, after the shock that has fallen on her,” Alban answered quietly. “She is not *my* Emily now. She will be *my* Emily yet. I told her I was convinced of it, in the old days at school—and my conviction is as strong as ever. Have you seen her, since I have been away at Netherwoods?”

“Yes; and she is as angry with me as she is with you.”

“For the same reason?”

“No, no. I heard enough to warn me to hold my tongue. I refused to help her—that’s all. You are a man, and you may run risks which no young girl ought

to encounter. Do you remember when I asked you to drop all further inquiries into the murder, for Emily's sake? The circumstances have altered since that time. Can I be of any use? '

"Of the greatest use, if you can give me Miss Jethro's address."

"Oh? You mean to begin in that way, do you?"

"Yes. You know that Miss Jethro visited me at Netherwoods?"

"Go on."

"She showed me your answer to a letter which she had written to you. Have you got that letter?"

Doctor Allday produced it. The address was at a post office, in a town on the south coast. Looking up when he had copied it, Alban saw the doctor's eyes fixed on him with an oddly-mingled expression: partly of sympathy, partly of hesitation.

"Have you anything to suggest?" he asked.

"You will get nothing out of Miss Jethro," the doctor answered, "unless——" there he stopped.

"Unless, what?"

"Unless you can frighten her."

"How am I to do that?"

After a little reflection, Doctor Allday returned, without any apparent reason, to the subject of his last visit to Emily.

"There was one thing she said, in the course of our talk," he continued, "which struck me as being sensible: possibly (for we are all more or less conceited), because I agreed with her myself. She suspects Miss Jethro of knowing more about that damnable murder than Miss Jethro is willing to acknowledge. If you want to produce the right effect on her——" he looked hard at Alban, and checked himself once more.

“Well? what am I to do?”

“Tell her you have an idea of who the murderer is.”

“But I have no idea.”

“But *I* have.”

“Good God! what do you mean?”

“Don’t mistake me! An impression has been produced on my mind—that’s all. Call it a freak of fancy; worth trying perhaps as a bold experiment, and worth nothing more. Come a little nearer. My housekeeper is an excellent woman, but I have once or twice caught her rather too near to that door. I think I’ll whisper it.”

He did whisper it. In breathless wonder, Alban heard of the doubt which had crossed Doctor Allday’s mind, on the evening when Mirabel had called at his house.

“You look as if you didn’t believe it,” the doctor remarked.

“I’m thinking of Emily. For her sake I

hope and trust you are wrong. Ought I to go to her at once? I don't know what to do!"

"Find out first, my good fellow, whether I am right or wrong. You can do it, if you will run the risk with Miss Jethro."

Alban recovered himself. His old friend's advice was clearly the right advice to follow. He examined his railway guide, and then looked at his watch. "If I can find Miss Jethro," he answered, "I'll risk it before the day is out."

The doctor accompanied him to the door. "You will write to me, won't you?"

"Without fail. Thank you—and good-bye."

Book the Seventh:

THE CLINK

BOOK THE SEVENTH:

The Clink.

CHAPTER LVIII.

A COUNCIL OF TWO.

EARLY in the last century one of the picturesque race of robbers and murderers, practising the vices of humanity on the borderlands watered by the river Tweed, built a tower of stone on the coast of Northumberland. He lived joyously in the perpetration of atrocities; and he died penitent, under the direction of his priest. Since that event, he has figured in poems and pictures; and has been greatly admired by modern ladies and gentlemen, whom he would have outraged and robbed if he

had been lucky enough to meet with them in the good old times.

His son succeeded him, and failed to profit by the paternal example: that is to say, he made the fatal mistake of fighting for other people instead of fighting for himself.

In the rebellion of Forty Five, this northern squire sided to serious purpose with Prince Charles and the Highlanders. He lost his head; and his children lost their inheritance. In the lapse of years, the confiscated property fell into the hands of strangers; the last of whom (having a taste for the turf) discovered, in course of time, that he was in want of money. A retired merchant, named Delvin (originally of French extraction), took a liking to the wild situation, and purchased the tower. His wife—already in failing health—had been ordered by the doctors to live a quiet

life by the sea. Her husband's death left her a rich and lonely widow; by day and night alike, a prisoner in her room; wasted by disease, and having but two interests which reconciled her to life—writing poetry in the intervals of pain, and paying the debts of a reverend brother who succeeded in the pulpit, and prospered nowhere else.

In the later days of its life, the tower had been greatly improved as a place of residence. The contrast was remarkable between the dreary grey outer walls, and the luxuriously furnished rooms inside, rising by two at a time to the lofty eighth story of the building. Among the scattered populace of the country round, the tower was still known by the odd name given to it in the bygone time—"The Clink." It had been so called (as was supposed) in allusion to the noise made by loose stones, washed backwards and forwards at certain

times of the tide, in hollows of the rock on which the building stood.

On the evening of her arrival at Mrs. Delvin's retreat, Emily retired at an early hour, fatigued by her long journey. Mirabel had an opportunity of speaking with his sister privately in her own room.

"Send me away, Agatha, if I disturb you," he said, "and let me know when I can see you in the morning."

"My dear Miles, have you forgotten that I am never able to sleep in calm weather? My lullaby, for years past, has been the moaning of the great North Sea, under my window. Listen! There is not a sound outside on this peaceful night. It is the right time of the tide, just now—and yet, 'the clink' is not to be heard. Is the moon up?"

Mirabel opened the curtains. "The whole sky is one great abyss of black," he

answered. "If I was superstitious, I should think that horrid darkness a bad omen for the future. Are you suffering, Agatha?"

"Not just now. I suppose I look sadly changed for the worse, since you saw me last?"

But for the feverish brightness of her eyes, she would have looked like a corpse. Her wrinkled forehead, her hollow cheeks, her white lips told their terrible tale of the suffering of years. The ghastly appearance of her face was heightened by the furnishing of the room. This doomed woman, dying slowly day by day, delighted in bright colours and sumptuous materials. The paper on the walls, the curtains, the carpet presented the hues of the rainbow. She lay on a couch covered with purple silk, under draperies of green velvet to keep her warm. Rich lace hid her scanty hair, turn-

ing prematurely grey ; brilliant rings glittered on her bony fingers. The room was in a blaze of light from lamps and candles. Even the wine at her side that kept her alive, had been decanted into a bottle of lustrous Venetian glass. "My grave is open," she used to say ; "and I want all these beautiful things to keep me from looking at it. I should die at once, if I was left in the dark."

Her brother sat by the couch, thinking. "Shall I tell you what is in your mind ?" she asked.

Mirabel humoured the caprice of the moment. "Tell me !" he said.

"You want to know what I think of Emily," she answered. "Your letter told me you were in love ; but I didn't believe your letter. I have always doubted whether you were capable of feeling true love—until I saw Emily. The moment she entered the

room, I knew that I had never properly appreciated my brother. You *are* in love with her, Miles; and you are a better man than I thought you. Does that express my opinion?"

Mirabel took her wasted hand, and kissed it gratefully.

"What a position I am in!" he said. "To love her as I love her; and, if she knew the truth, to be the object of her horror—to be the man whom she would hunt to the scaffold, as an act of duty to the memory of her father!"

"You have left out the worst part of it," Mrs. Delvin reminded him. "You have bound yourself to help her to find the man. Your one hope of persuading her to become your wife rests on your success in finding him. And you are the man. There is your situation! You can't submit to it. How can you escape from it?"

"You are trying to frighten me, Agatha."

"I am trying to encourage you to face your position boldly."

"I am doing my best," Mirabel said, with sullen resignation. "Fortune has favoured me so far. I have, really and truly, been unable to satisfy Emily by discovering Miss Jethro. She has left the place at which I saw her last—there is no trace to be found of her—and Emily knows it."

"Don't forget," Mrs. Delvin replied, "that there is a trace to be found of Mrs. Rook, and that Emily expects you to follow it."

Mirabel shuddered. "I am surrounded by dangers, whichever way I look," he said. "Do what I may, it turns out to be wrong. I was wrong, perhaps, when I brought Emily here."

"No!"

"I could easily make an excuse," Mirabel

persisted, "and take her back to London."

"And for all you know to the contrary," his wiser sister replied, "Mrs. Rook may go to London; and you may take Emily back in time to receive her at the cottage. In every way you are safer in my old tower. And—don't forget—you have got my money to help you, if you want it. In my belief, Miles, you *will* want it."

"You are the dearest and best of sisters! What do you recommend me to do?"

"What you would have been obliged to do," Mrs. Delvin answered, "if you had remained in London. You must go to Redwood Hall to-morrow, as Emily has arranged it. If Mrs. Rook is not there, you must ask for her address in Scotland. If nobody knows the address, you must still bestir yourself in trying to find it. And, when you do fall in with Mrs. Rook—"

"Well?"

"Take care, wherever it may be, that you see her privately."

Mirabel was alarmed. "Don't keep me in suspense," he burst out. "Tell me what you propose."

"Never mind what I propose, to-night. Before I can tell you what I have in my mind, I must know whether Mrs. Rook is in England or Scotland. Bring me that information to-morrow, and I shall have something to say to you. Hark! The wind is rising, the rain is falling. There is a chance of sleep for me—I shall soon hear the sea. Good-night."

"Good-night, dearest—and thank you again, and again!"

CHAPTER LIX.

THE ACCIDENT AT BELFORD.

EARLY in the morning Mirabel set forth for Redwood Hall, in one of the vehicles which Mrs. Delvin still kept at The Clink for the convenience of visitors. He returned soon after noon; having obtained information of the whereabouts of Mrs. Rook and her husband. When they had last been heard of, they were at Lasswade, near Edinburgh. Whether they had, or had not, obtained the situation of which they were in search, neither Miss Redwood, nor anyone else at the Hall, could tell.

In half an hour more, another horse was harnessed, and Mirabel was on his

way to the railway station at Belford, to follow Mrs Rook at Emily's urgent request. Before his departure, he had an interview with his sister.

Mrs. Delvin was rich enough to believe implicitly in the power of money. Her method of extricating her brother from the serious difficulties that beset him, was to make it worth the while of Mr. and Mrs. Rook to leave England. Their passage to America would be secretly paid; and they would take with them a letter of credit addressed to a banker in New York. If Mirabel failed to discover them, after they had sailed, Emily could not blame his want of devotion to her interests. He understood this; but he remained desponding and irresolute, even with the money in his hands. The one person who could rouse his courage and animate his hope, was also the one person

who must know nothing of what had passed between his sister and himself. He had no choice but to leave Emily, without being cheered by her bright looks, invigorated by her inspiring words. Mirabel went away on his doubtful errand with a heavy heart.

“The Clink” was so far from the nearest post town, that the few letters, usually addressed to the tower, were delivered by private arrangement with a messenger. The man’s punctuality depended on the convenience of his superiors employed at the office. Sometimes he arrived early, and sometimes he arrived late. On this particular morning he presented himself, at half past one o’clock, with a letter for Emily; and when Mrs. Ellmother smartly reproved him for the delay, he coolly attributed it to the hospitality of friends whom he had met on the road.

The letter, directed to Emily at the cottage, had been forwarded from London by the person left in charge. It addressed her as, “Honoured Miss.” She turned at once to the end—and discovered the signature of Mrs. Rook!

“And Mr. Mirabel has gone,” Emily exclaimed, “just when his presence is of the greatest importance to us!”

Shrewd Mrs. Ellmother suggested that it might be as well to read the letter first—and then to form an opinion.

Emily read it.

“Lasswade, near Edinburgh, Sept. 26th.

“Honoured Miss,—I take up my pen to bespeak your kind sympathy for my husband and myself; two old people thrown on the world again by the death of our excellent master. We are under a month’s notice to leave Redwood Hall.

“Hearing of a situation at this place (also that our expenses would be paid if we applied personally), we got leave of absence, and made our application. The lady and her son are either the stingiest people that ever lived—or they have taken a dislike to me and my husband, and they make money a means of getting rid of us easily. Suffice it to say that we have refused to accept starvation wages, and that we are still out of place. It is just possible that you may have heard of something to suit us. So I write at once, knowing that good chances are often lost through needless delay.

“We stop at Belford on our way back, to see some friends of my husband, and we hope to get to Redwood Hall in good time on the 28th. Would you please address me to care of Miss Redwood, in case you know of any good

situation for which we could apply. Perhaps, we may be driven to try our luck in London. In this case, will you permit me to have the honour of presenting my respects, as I ventured to propose when I wrote to you a little time since.

"I beg to remain, Honoured Miss,

"Your humble servant,

R. ROOK."

Emily handed the letter to Mrs. Ellmother. "Read it," she said, "and tell me what you think."

"I think you had better be careful."

"Careful of Mrs. Rook?"

"Yes—and careful of Mrs. Delvin too."

Emily was astonished. "Are you really speaking seriously?" she said. "Mrs. Delvin is a most interesting person; so patient under her sufferings; so kind, so clever; so interested in all that interests *me*. I

shall take the letter to her at once, and ask her advice."

"Have your own way, Miss. I can't tell you why—but I don't like her!"

Mrs. Delvin's devotion to the interests of her guest took even Emily by surprise. After reading Mrs. Rook's letter, she rang the bell on her table in a frenzy of impatience. "My brother must be instantly recalled," she said. "Telegraph to him in your own name, telling him what has happened. He will find the message waiting for him, at the end of his journey."

The groom, summoned by the bell, was ordered to saddle the third and last horse left in the stables; to take the telegram to Belford, and to wait there until the answer arrived.

"How far is it to Redwood Hall?" Emily asked, when the man had received his orders.

"Ten miles," Mrs. Delvin answered.

"How can I get there to-day?"

"My dear, you can't get there."

"Pardon me, Mrs. Delvin, I must get there."

"Pardon *me*. My brother represents you in this matter. Leave it to my brother."

The tone taken by Mirabel's sister was positive, to say the least of it. Emily thought of what her faithful old servant had said, and began to doubt her own discretion in so readily showing the letter. The mistake—if a mistake it was—had however been committed; and, wrong or right, she was not disposed to occupy the subordinate position which Mrs. Delvin had assigned to her.

"If you will look at Mrs. Rook's letter again," Emily replied, "you will see that I ought to answer it. She supposes I am in London."

"Do you propose to tell Mrs. Rook that

you are in this house?" Mrs. Delvin asked.

"Certainly."

"You had better consult my brother, before you take any responsibility on yourself."

Emily kept her temper. "Allow me to remind you," she said, "that Mr. Mirabel is not acquainted with Mrs. Rook—and that I am. If I speak to her personally, I can do much to assist the object of our inquiries, before he returns. She is not an easy woman to deal with——"

"And therefore," Mrs. Delvin interposed, the sort of person who requires careful handling by a man like my brother—a man of the world."

"The sort of person, as I venture to think," Emily persisted, "whom I ought to see with as little loss of time as possible."

Mrs. Delvin waited awhile before she replied. In her condition of health, anxiety

was not easy to bear. Mrs. Rook's letter and Emily's obstinacy, had seriously irritated her. But, like all persons of ability, she was capable, when there was serious occasion for it, of exerting self-control. She really liked and admired Emily; and, as the elder woman and the hostess, she set an example of forbearance and good humour.

"It is out of my power to send you to Redwood Hall at once," she resumed. "The only one of my three horses, now at your disposal, is the horse which took my brother to the Hall this morning. A distance, there and back, of twenty miles. You are not in too great a hurry, I am sure, to allow the horse time to rest?"

Emily made her excuses with perfect grace and sincerity. "I had no idea the distance was so great," she confessed. "I will wait, dear Mrs. Delvin, as long as you like."

They parted as good friends as ever—with a certain reserve, nevertheless, on either side. Emily's eager nature was depressed and irritated by the prospect of delay. Mrs. Delvin, on the other hand (devoted to her brother's interests), thought hopefully of obstacles which might present themselves with the lapse of time. The horse might prove to be incapable of further exertion for that day. Or the threatening aspect of the weather might end in a storm.

But the hours passed—and the sky cleared—and the horse was reported to be fit for work again. Fortune was against the lady of the tower; she had no choice but to submit.

Mrs. Delvin had just sent word to Emily that the carriage would be ready for her in ten minutes, when the coach-

man who had driven Mirabel to Belford returned. He brought news which agreeably surprised both the ladies. Mirabel had reached the station five minutes too late; the coachman had left him waiting the arrival of the next train to the North. He would now receive the telegraphic message at Belford, and might return immediately by taking the groom's horse. Mrs. Delvin left it to Emily to decide whether she would proceed by herself to Redwood Hall, or wait for Mirabel's return.

Under the changed circumstances, Emily would have acted ungraciously if she had persisted in holding to her first intention. She consented to wait.

The sea still remained calm. In the stillness of the moorland solitude on the western side of "The Clink," the rapid steps of a horse were heard at some little distance on the high road. Emily

ran out, followed by careful Mrs. Ellmother, expecting to meet Mirabel.

She was disappointed: it was the groom who had returned. As he pulled up at the house, and dismounted, Emily noticed that the man looked excited.

“Is there anything wrong?” she asked.

“There has been an accident, Miss.”

“Not to Mr. Mirabel!”

“No, no, Miss. An accident to a poor foolish woman, travelling from Lasswade.”

Emily looked at Mrs. Ellmother. “It can’t be Mrs. Rook!” she said.

“That’s the name, Miss! She got out before the train had quite stopped, and fell on the platform.”

“Was she hurt?”

“Seriously hurt, as I heard. They carried her into a house hard by—and sent for the doctor.”

"Was Mr. Mirabel one of the people who helped her?"

"He was on the other side of the platform, Miss; waiting for the train from London. I got to the station and gave him the telegram, just as the accident took place. We crossed over to hear more about it. Mr. Mirabel was telling me that he would return to "The Clink" on my horse—when he heard the woman's name mentioned. Upon that, he changed his mind and went to the house."

"Was he let in?"

"The doctor wouldn't hear of it. He was making his examination; and he said nobody was to be in the room but her husband, and the woman of the house."

"Is Mr. Mirabel waiting to see her?"

"Yes, Miss. He said he would wait all day, if necessary; and he gave me this bit of a note to take to the mistress."

Emily turned to Mrs. Ellmother. "It's impossible to stay here, not knowing whether Mrs. Rook is going to live or die," she said. "I shall go to Belford—and you will go with me."

The groom interfered. "I beg your pardon, Miss. It was Mr. Mirabel's most particular wish that you were not, on any account, to go to Belford."

"Why not?"

"He didn't say."

Emily eyed the note in the man's hand with well-grounded distrust. In all probability, Mirabel's object in writing was to instruct his sister to prevent her guest from going to Belford. The carriage was waiting at the door. With her usual promptness of resolution, Emily decided on taking it for granted that she was free to use as she pleased, a carriage which had been already placed at her disposal.

"Tell your mistress," she said to the groom, "that I am going to Belford instead of to Redwood Hall."

In a minute more, she and Mrs. Ellmother were on their way to join Mirabel at the station.

CHAPTER LX.

OUTSIDE THE ROOM.

EMILY found Mirabel in the waiting-room at Belford. Her sudden appearance might well have amazed him; but his face expressed a more serious emotion than surprise—he looked at her as if she had alarmed him.

“Didn’t you get my message?” he asked. “I told the groom I wished you to wait for my return. I sent a note to my sister, in case he made any mistake.”

“The man made no mistake,” Emily answered. “I was in too great a hurry to be able to speak with Mrs. Delvin. Did you really suppose I could endure the

suspense of waiting till you came back? Do you think I can be of no use—I who know Mrs. Rook?"

"They won't let you see her."

"Why not? *You* seem to be waiting to see her."

"I am waiting for the return of the rector of Belford. He is at Berwick; and he has been sent for, at Mrs. Rook's urgent request."

"Is she dying?"

"She is in fear of death—whether rightly or wrongly, I don't know. There is some internal injury from the fall. I hope to see her when the rector returns. As a brother clergyman, I may with perfect propriety ask him to use his influence in my favour."

"I am glad to find you so eager about it."

"I am always eager in your interests."

“Don’t think me ungrateful,” Emily replied, gently. “I am no stranger to Mrs. Rook; and, if I send in my name, I may be able to see her, before the clergyman returns.”

She stopped. Mirabel suddenly moved so as to place himself between her and the door. “I must really beg of you to give up that idea,” he said; “you don’t know what horrid sight you may see—what dreadful agonies of pain this unhappy woman may be suffering.”

His manner suggested to Emily that he might be acting under some motive, which he was unwilling to acknowledge. “If you have a reason for wishing that I should keep away from Mrs. Rook,” she said, “let me hear what it is. Surely we trust each other? I have done my best to set the example, at any rate.”

Mirabel seemed to be at a loss for a reply.

While he was hesitating, the station-master passed the door. Emily asked him to direct her to the house in which Mrs. Rook had been received. He led the way to the end of the platform, and pointed to the house. Emily and Mrs. Ellmother immediately left the station. Mirabel accompanied them, still remonstrating, still raising obstacles.

The house door was opened by an old man. He looked reproachfully at Mirabel. "You have been told already," he said, "that no strangers are to see my wife."

Encouraged by discovering that the man was Mr. Rook, Emily mentioned her name. "Perhaps you may have heard Mrs. Rook speak of me," she added.

"I've heard her speak of you oftentimes."

"What does the doctor say?"

"He thinks she may get over it. She doesn't believe him."

“Will you say that I am anxious to see her, if she feels well enough to receive me?”

Mr. Rook looked at Mrs. Ellmother. “Are there two of you wanting to go upstairs?” he inquired.

“This is my old friend and servant,” Emily answered. “She will wait for me down here.”

“She can wait in the parlour; the good people of this house are well known to me.” He pointed to the parlour door—and then led the way to the first floor. Emily followed him. Mirabel, as obstinate as ever, followed Emily.

Mr. Rook opened a door at the end of the landing; and, turning round to speak to Emily, noticed Mirabel standing behind her. Without making any remark, the old man pointed significantly down the stairs. His resolution was evidently immovable. Mirabel appealed to Emily to help him.

"She will see me, if *you* ask her," he said. "Let me wait here."

The sound of his voice was instantly followed by a cry from the bed-chamber—a cry of terror.

Mr. Rook hurried into the room, and closed the door. In less than a minute, he opened it again, with doubt and horror plainly visible in his face. He stepped up to Mirabel—eyed him with the closest scrutiny—and drew back again with a look of relief.

"She's wrong," he said; "you are not the man."

This strange proceeding startled Emily. "What man do you mean?" she asked.

Mr. Rook took no notice of the question. Still looking at Mirabel, he pointed down the stairs once more. With vacant eyes—moving mechanically, like a sleep-walker in his dream—Mirabel silently obeyed. Mr. Rook turned to Emily.

“Are you easily frightened?” he said.

“I don’t understand you,” Emily replied, “Who is going to frighten me? Why did you speak to Mr. Mirabel in that strange way?”

Mr. Rook looked towards the bedroom door. “Maybe you’ll hear why, inside there. If I could have my way, you shouldn’t see her—but she’s not to be reasoned with. A caution, Miss. Don’t be too ready to believe what my wife may say to you. She’s had a fright.” He opened the door. “In my belief,” he whispered, “she’s off her head.”

Emily crossed the threshold. Mr. Rook softly closed the door behind her.

CHAPTER LXI.

INSIDE THE ROOM.

A DECENT elderly woman was seated at the bedside. She rose, and spoke to Emily with a mingling of sorrow and confusion strikingly expressed in her face. "It isn't my fault," she said, "that Mrs. Rook receives you in this manner; I am obliged to humour her."

She drew aside, and showed Mrs. Rook with her head supported by many pillows, and her face strangely hidden from view under a veil. Emily started back in horror. "Is her face injured?" she asked.

Mrs. Rook answered the question herself. Her voice was low and weak; but she still spoke with the same nervous hurry

of articulation which had been remarked by Alban Morris, on the day when she asked him to direct her to Netherwood.

“Not exactly injured,” she explained; “but one’s appearance is a matter of some anxiety even on one’s deathbed. I am disfigured by a thoughtless use of water, to bring me to when I had my fall—and I can’t get at my toilet-things to put myself right again. I don’t wish to shock you. Please excuse the veil.”

Emily remembered the rouge on her cheeks, and the dye on her hair, when they had first seen each other at the school. Vanity—of all human frailties the longest-lived—still held its firmly rooted place in this woman’s nature; superior to torment of conscience, unassailable by terror of death!

The good woman of the house waited a moment before she left the room. “What

"I SAY NO."

shall I say," she asked, "if the clergyman comes?"

Mrs. Rook lifted her hand solemnly. "Say," she answered, "that a dying sinner is making atonement for sin. Say this young lady is present, by the decree of an all-wise Providence. No mortal creature must disturb us." Her hand dropped back heavily on the bed. "Are we alone?" she asked.

"We are alone," Emily answered. "What made you scream just before I came in?"

"No! I can't allow you to remind me of that," Mrs. Rook protested. "I must compose myself. Be quiet. Let me think."

Recovering her composure, she also recovered that sense of enjoyment in talking of herself, which was one of the marked peculiarities in her character,

"You will excuse me if I exhibit religion,"

she resumed. "My dear parents were exemplary people; I was most carefully brought up. Are you pious? Let us hope so."

Emily was once more reminded of the past.

The bygone time returned to her memory—the time when she had accepted Sir Jervis Redwood's offer of employment, and when Mrs. Rook had arrived at the school to be her travelling companion to the north. The wretched creature had entirely forgotten her own loose talk, after she had drunk Miss Ladd's good wine to the last drop in the bottle. As she was boasting now of her piety, so she had boasted then of her lost faith and hope, and had mockingly declared her free-thinking opinions to be the result of her ill-assorted marriage. Forgotten—all forgotten, in this later time of pain and fear. Pros-

trate under the "dread of death, her innermost nature—stripped of the concealments of her later life—was revealed to view. The early religious training, at which she had scoffed in the insolence of health and strength, revealed its latent influence—intermitted, but a living influence always from first to last. Mrs. Rook was tenderly mindful of her exemplary parents, and proud of exhibiting religion, on the bed from which she was never to rise again.

"Did I tell you that I am a miserable sinner?" she asked, after an interval of silence.

Emily could endure it no longer. "Say that to the clergyman," she answered—"not to me."

"Oh, but I must say it!" Mrs. Rook insisted. "I *am* a miserable sinner. Let me give you an instance of it," she continued, with a shameless relish of the

memory of her own frailties. "I have been a drinker, in my time. Anything was welcome, when the fit was on me, as long as it got into my head. Like other persons in liquor, I sometimes talked of things that had better have been kept secret. We bore that in mind—my old man and I—when we were engaged by Sir Jervis. Miss Redwood wanted to put us in the next bedroom to hers—a risk not to be run. I might have talked of the murder at the inn; and she might have heard me. Please to remark a curious thing. Whatever else I might let out, when I was in my cups, not a word about the pocket-book ever dropped from me. You will ask how I know it. My dear, I should have heard of it from my husband, if I had let *that* out—and he is as much in the dark as you are. Wonderful are the workings of the human mind, as the poet

says; and drink drowns care, as the proverb says. But can drink deliver a person from fear by day, and fear by night? I believe, if I had dropped a word about the pocket-book, it would have sobered me in a instant. Have you any remark to make on this curious circumstance?"

Thus far, Emily had allowed the woman to ramble on, in the hope of getting information which direct inquiry might fail to produce. It was impossible, however, to pass over the allusion to the pocket-book. After giving her time to recover from the exhaustion which her heavy breathing sufficiently revealed, Emily put the question :

"Who did the pocket-book belong to?"

"Wait a little," said Mrs. Rook. "Everything in its right place, is my motto. I mustn't begin with the pocket-book. Why

did I begin with it? Do you think this veil on my face confuses me? Suppose I take it off. But you must promise first—solemnly promise you won't look at my face. How can I tell you about the murder (the murder is part of my confession, you know), with this lace tickling my skin? Go away—and stand there with your back to me. Thank you. Now I'll take it off. Ha! the air feels refreshing; I know what I am about. Good heavens, I have forgotten something! I have forgotten *him*. And after such a fright as he gave me! Did you see him on the landing?"

"Who are you talking of?" Emily asked.

Mrs. Rook's failing voice sank lower still.

"Come closer," she said; "this must be whispered. "Who am I talking of?" she repeated. "I am talking of the man who slept in the other bed at the inn; the man who did the deed with his own razor. He

was gone when I looked into the out-house in the grey of the morning. Oh, I have done my duty! I have told Mr. Rook to keep an eye on him downstairs. You haven't an idea how obstinate and stupid my husband is. He says I couldn't know the man, because I didn't see him. Ha! there's such a thing as hearing, when you don't see. I heard—and I knew it again."

Emily turned cold, from head to foot.

"What did you know again?" she said.

"His voice," Mrs. Rook answered. "I'll swear to his voice, before all the judges in England."

Emily rushed to the bed. She looked at the woman who had said those dreadful words, speechless with horror.

"You're breaking your promise!" cried Mrs. Rook. "You false girl, you're breaking your promise!"

She snatched at the veil, and put it on

again. The sight of her face, momentary as it had been, reassured Emily. Her wild eyes, made wilder still by the blurred stains of rouge below them, half washed away—her dishevelled hair, with streaks of grey showing through the dye—presented a spectacle which would have been grotesque under other circumstances, but which now reminded Emily of Mr. Rook's last words; warning her not to believe what his wife said, and even declaring his conviction that her intellect was deranged. Emily drew back from the bed, conscious of an overpowering sense of self-reproach. Although it was only for a moment, she had allowed her faith in Mirabel to be shaken by a woman who was out of her mind.

“Try to forgive me,” she said. “I didn't wilfully break my promise; you frightened me.”

Mrs. Rook began to cry. “I was a hand-

some woman in my time," she murmured. "You would say I am handsome still, if the clumsy fools about me had not spoilt my appearance. Oh, I do feel so weak! Where's my medicine?"

The bottle was on the table. Emily gave her the prescribed dose, and revived her failing strength.

"I am an extraordinary person," she resumed. "My resolution has always been the admiration of everyone who knew me. But my mind feels—how shall I express it?—a little vacant. Have mercy on my poor wicked soul! Help me."

"How can I help you?"

"I want to recollect. Something happened in the summer time, when we were talking at Netherwoods. I mean when that impudent master at the school showed his suspicions of me. (Lord! how he frightened me, when he turned up afterwards at Sir

Jervis's house). You must have seen yourself he suspected me. How did he show it?"

"He showed you my locket," Emily answered,

"Oh, the horrid reminder of the murder!" Mrs. Rook exclaimed. "*I* didn't mention it; don't blame Me. You poor innocent, I have something dreadful to tell you."

Emily's horror of the woman forced her to speak. "Don't tell me!" she cried. "I know more than you suppose; I know what I was ignorant of when you saw the locket."

Mrs. Rook took offence at the interruption.

"Clever as you are, there's one thing you don't know," she said. "You asked me, just now, who the pocket-book belonged to. It belonged to your father. What's the matter? Are you crying?"

Emily was thinking of her father. The pocket-book was the last present she had given to him—a present on his birthday. "Is it lost?" she asked, sadly.

"No; it's not lost. You will hear more of it directly. Dry your eyes, and expect something interesting—I'm going to talk about love. Love, my dear, means myself. Why shouldn't it? I'm not the only nice-looking woman, married to an old man, who has had a lover."

"Wretch! what has that got to do with it?"

"Everything, you rude girl! My lover was like the rest of them; he would bet on race-horses, and he lost. He owed it to me, on the day when your father came to our inn. He said, 'I must find the money—or be off to America, and say good-bye for ever.' I was fool enough to be fond of him. It broke my heart to hear him talk

in that way. I said ‘If I find the money, and more than the money, will you take me with you wherever you go?’ Of course, he said Yes. I suppose you have heard of the inquest held at our old place by the coroner and jury? Oh, what idiots! They believe I was asleep on the night of the murder. I never closed my eyes—I was so miserable, I was so tempted.”

“Tempted? What tempted you?”

“Do you think I had any money to spare? Your father’s pocket-book tempted me. I had seen him open it, to pay his bill over-night. It was full of bank-notes. Oh, what an overpowering thing love is! Perhaps you have known it yourself.”

Emily’s indignation once more got the better of her prudence. “Have you no feeling of decency on your deathbed!” she said.

Mrs. Rook forgot her piety; she was

ready with an impudent rejoinder. “ You hot-headed little woman, your time will come,” she answered. “ But you’re right—I am wandering from the point; I am not sufficiently sensible of this solemn occasion. By-the-bye, do you notice my language? I inherit correct English from my mother—a cultivated person, who married beneath her. My maternal grandfather was a gentleman. Did I tell you that there came a time, on that dreadful night, when I could stay in bed no longer? The pocket-book—I did nothing but think of that devilish pocket-book, full of bank-notes. My husband was fast asleep all the time. I got a chair and stood on it. I looked into the place where the two men were sleeping, through the glass in the top of the door. Your father was awake; he was walking up and down the room. What do you say? Was he agitated? I didn’t notice. I don’t know

whether the other man was asleep or awake. I saw nothing but the pocket-book stuck under the pillow, half in and half out. Your father kept on walking up and down. I thought to myself, 'I'll wait till he gets tired, and then I'll have another look at the pocket-book.' Where's the wine? The doctor said I might have a glass of wine when I wanted it."

Emily found the wine and gave it to her. She shuddered as she accidentally touched Mrs. Rook's hand.

The wine helped the sinking woman.

"I must have got up more than once," she resumed. "And more than once my heart must have failed me. I don't clearly remember what I did, till the grey of the morning came. I think that must have been the last time I looked through the glass in the door."

She began to tremble. She tore the veil

off her face. She cried out piteously, "Lord be merciful to me a sinner! Come here," she said to Emily. "Where are you? No! I daren't tell you what I saw; I daren't tell you what I did. When you're possessed by the devil, there's nothing, nothing, nothing you can't do! Where did I find the courage to unlock the door? Where did I find the courage to go in? Any other woman would have lost her senses, when she found blood on her fingers after taking the pocket-book——"

Emily's head swam; her heart beat furiously—she staggered to the door, and opened it to escape from the room.

"I'm guilty of robbing him; but I'm innocent of his blood!" Mrs. Rook called after her wildly. "The deed was done—the yard door was wide open, and the man was gone—when I looked in for the last time. Come back, come back!"

Emily looked round.

“I can’t go near you,” she said, faintly.

“Come near enough to see this.”

She opened her bedgown at the throat, and drew up a loop of ribbon over her head. The pocket-book was attached to the ribbon. She held it out.

“Your father’s book,” she said. “Won’t you take your father’s book?”

For a moment, and only for a moment, Emily was repelled by the profanation associated with her birthday gift. Then, the loving remembrance of the dear hands that had so often touched that relic, drew the faithful daughter back to the woman whom she abhorred. Her eyes rested tenderly on the book. Before it had lain in that guilty bosom, it had been *his* book. The beloved memory was all that was left to her now; the beloved memory consecrated it to her hand. She took the book.

"Open it," said Mrs. Rook.

There were two five pound bank-notes in it.

"His?" Emily asked.

"No; mine—the little I have been able to save towards restoring what I stole."

"Oh!" Emily cried, "is there some good in this woman, after all?"

"There's no good in the woman!" Mrs. Rook answered desperately. "There's nothing but fear—fear of hell now; fear of the pocket-book in the past time. Twice I tried to destroy it—and twice it came back, to remind me of the duty that I owed to my miserable soul. I tried to throw it into the fire. It struck the bar, and fell back into the fender at my feet. I went out, and cast it into the well. It came back again in the first bucket of water that was drawn up. From that moment, I began to save what I could.

Restitution! Atonement! I tell you the book found a tongue—and those were the grand words it dinned in my ears, morning and night.” She stopped to fetch her breath—stopped, and struck her bosom. “I hid it here, so that no person should see it, and no person take it from me. Superstition? oh yes, superstition! Shall I tell you something? *You* may find yourself superstitious, if you are ever cut to the heart as I was. He left me! The man I had disgraced myself for, deserted me on the day when I gave him the stolen money. He suspected it was stolen; he took care of his own cowardly self—and left me to the hard mercy of the law, if the theft was found out. What do you call that, in the way of punishment? Haven’t I suffered? Haven’t I made atonement? Be a Christian—say you forgive me.”

“I do forgive you.”

"Say you will pray for me."

"I will."

"Ha! that comforts me! Now you can go."

Emily looked at her imploringly. "Don't send me away, knowing no more of the murder than I knew when I came here! Is there nothing, really nothing, you can tell me?"

Mrs. Rook pointed to the door.

"Haven't I told you already? Go downstairs, and see the wretch who escaped in the dawn of the morning!"

"Gently, ma'am - gently! You're talking too loud," cried a mocking voice from outside.

"It's only the doctor," said Mrs. Rook. She crossed her hands over her bosom, with a deep-drawn sigh. "I want no doctor, now. My peace is made with my Maker. I'm ready for death; I'm fit for Heaven. Go away! go away!"

CHAPTER LXII.

DOWNSTAIRS.

IN a moment more, the doctor came in: a brisk, smiling, self-sufficient man—smartly dressed, with a flower in his button-hole. A stifling odour of musk filled the room, as he drew out his handkerchiet with a flourish, and wiped his forehead.

“Plenty of hard work in my line, just now,” he said. “Hullo, Mrs. Rook! somebody has been allowing you to excite yourself. I heard you, before I opened the door. Have you been encouraging her to talk?” he asked; turning to Emily, and shaking his finger at her with an air of facetious remonstrance.

Incapable of answering him ; forgetful of the ordinary restraints of social intercourse—with the one doubt that preserved her belief in Mirabel, eager for confirmation—Emily signed to this stranger to follow her into a corner of the room, out of hearing. She made no excuses : she took no notice of his look of surprise. One hope was all she could feel, one word was all she could say, after that second assertion of Mirabel's guilt. Indicating Mrs. Rook by a glance at the bed, she whispered the word :

“ Mad ? ”

Flippant and familiar, the doctor imitated her ; he too looked at the bed.

“ No more mad than you are, Miss. As I said just now, my patient has been exciting herself ; I dare say she has talked a little wildly in consequence. *Hers* isn't a brain to give way I can tell you. But there's somebody else——”

Emily had fled from the room. He had destroyed her last fragment of belief in Mirabel's innocence. She was on the landing trying to control herself, when the doctor joined her.

"Are you acquainted with the gentleman downstairs?" he asked.

"What gentleman?"

"I haven't heard his name; he looks like a clergyman. If you know him——"

"I do know him. I can't answer questions! My mind——"

"Steady your mind, Miss; and take your friend home as soon as you can. *He* hasn't got Mrs. Rook's hard brain; he's in a state of nervous prostration, which may end badly. Do you know where he lives?"

"He is staying with his sister—Mrs. Delvin."

"Mrs. Delvin! she's a friend and patient of mine. Say I'll look in to-morrow morning, and see what I can do for her

brother. In the meantime, get him to bed, and to rest; and don't be afraid of giving him brandy."

The doctor returned to the bedroom. Emily heard Mrs. Ellmother's voice below.

"Are you up there, Miss?"

"Yes."

Mrs. Ellmother ascended the stairs. "It was in an evil hour," she said, "that you insisted on going to this place. Mr. Mirabel——" The sight of Emily's face suspended the next words on her lips. She took the poor young mistress in her motherly arms. "Oh, my child! what has happened to you?"

"Don't ask me now. Give me your arm—let us go downstairs."

"You won't be startled when you see Mr. Mirabel--will you, my dear? I wouldn't let them disturb you; I said nobody should speak to you but myself. The truth is, Mr.

Mirabel has had a dreadful fright. What are you looking for?"

"Is there a garden here? Any place where we can breathe the fresh air?"

There was a courtyard at the back of the house. They found their way to it. A bench was placed against one of the walls. They sat down.

"Shall I wait till you're better before I say any more?" Mrs. Elmother asked. "No? You want to hear about Mr. Mirabel? My dear, he came into the parlour where I was; and Mr. Rook came in too—and waited, looking at him. Mr. Mirabel sat down in a corner, in a dazed state as I thought. It wasn't for long. He jumped up, and clapped his hand on his heart as if his heart hurt him. 'I must and will know what's going on upstairs,' he says. Mr. Rook pulled him back, and told him to wait till the young lady came down. Mr.

Mirabel wouldn't hear of it. 'Your wife's frightening her,' he says; 'your wife's telling her horrible things about me.' He was taken on a sudden with a shivering fit; his eyes rolled, and his teeth chattered. Mr. Rook made matters worse; he lost his temper. 'I'm damned,' he says, 'if I don't begin to think you *are* the man, after all; I've half a mind to send for the police.' Mr. Mirabel dropped into his chair. His eyes stared, his mouth fell open. I took hold of his hand. Cold—cold as ice. What it all meant I can't say. Oh, Miss, *you* know! Let me tell you the rest of it some other time."

Emily insisted on hearing more. "The end!" she cried. "How did it end?"

"I don't know how it might have ended, if the doctor hadn't come in—to pay his visit, you know, upstairs. He said some learned words. When he came to plain

English, he asked if anybody had frightened the gentleman. I said Mr. Rook had frightened him. The doctor says to Mr. Rook, 'Mind what you are about. If you frighten him again, you may have his death to answer for.' That cowed Mr. Rook. He asked what he had better do. 'Give me some brandy for him first,' says the doctor; 'and then get him home at once.' I found the brandy, and went away to the inn to order the carriage. Your ears are quicker than mine, Miss—do I hear it now?"

They rose, and went to the house door. The carriage was there.

Still cowed by what the doctor had said, Mr. Rook appeared, carefully leading Mirabel out. He had revived under the action of the stimulant. Passing Emily he raised his eyes to her—trembled—and looked down again. When Mr. Rook opened the door of the carriage he paused, with one

of his feet on the step. A momentary impulse inspired him with a false courage, and brought a flush into his ghastly face. He turned to Emily.

"May I speak to you?" he asked.

She started back from him. He looked at Mrs. Ellmother. "Tell her I am innocent," he said. The trembling seized on him again. Mr. Rook was obliged to lift him into the carriage.

Emily caught at Mrs. Ellmother's arm. "You go with him," she said. "I can't."

"How are you to get back, Miss?"

She turned away, and spoke to the coachman. "I am not very well. I want the fresh air—I'll sit by you."

Mrs. Ellmother remonstrated and protested, in vain. As Emily had determined it should be, so it was.

"Has he said anything?" she asked,

when they had arrived at their journey's end.

“He has been like a man frozen up ; he hasn't said a word ; he hasn't even moved.”

“Take him to his sister ; and tell her all that you know. Be careful to repeat what the doctor said. I can't face Mrs. Delvin. Be patient, my good old friend ; I have no secrets from you. Only wait till to-morrow ; and leave me by myself to-night.”

Alone in her room, Emily opened her writing-case. Searching among the letters in it, she drew out a printed paper. It was the Handbill describing the man who had escaped from the inn, and offering a reward for the discovery of him.

At the first line of the personal description of the fugitive, the paper dropped from her hand. Burning tears forced their way into her eyes. Feeling for her hand-

kerchief, she touched the pocket-book which she had received from Mrs. Rook.

After a little hesitation she took it out. She looked at it. She opened it.

The sight of the bank-notes repelled her ; she hid them in one of the pockets of the book. There was a second pocket which she had not yet examined. She put her hand into it, and, touching something, drew out a letter.

The envelope (already opened) was addressed to "James Brown, Esq., Post Office, Zeeland." Would it be inconsistent with her respect for her father's memory to examine the letter ? No ; a glance would decide whether she ought to read it or not.

It was without date or address ; a startling letter to look at—for it only contained three words :

"I say No."

The words were signed in initials :

“S. J.”

In the instant when she read the initials,
the name occurred to her.

Sara Jethro !

CHAPTER LXIII.

THE DEFENCE OF MIRABEL.

THE discovery of the letter gave a new direction to Emily's thoughts—and so, for the time at least, relieved her mind from the burden that weighed on it. To what question, on her father's part, had "I say No" been Miss Jethro's brief and stern reply? Neither letter nor envelope offered the slightest hint that might assist inquiry; even the postmark had been so carelessly impressed that it was illegible.

Emily was still pondering over the three mysterious words, when she was interrupted by Mrs. Ellmother's voice at the door.

"I must ask you to let me come in,

Miss; though I know you wished to be left by yourself till to-morrow. Mrs. Delvin says she must positively see you to-night. It's my belief that she will send for the servants, and have herself carried in here, if you refuse to do what she asks. You needn't be afraid of seeing Mr. Mirabel."

"Where is he?"

"His sister has given up her bedroom to him," Mrs. Ellmother answered. "She thought of your feelings before she sent me here—and had the curtains closed between the sitting-room and the bed-room. I suspect my nasty temper misled me, when I took a dislike to Mrs. Delvin. She's a good creature; I'm sorry you didn't go to her as soon as we got back."

"Did she seem to be angry, when she sent you here?"

"Angry! She was crying when I left her."

Emily hesitated no longer.

She noticed a remarkable change in the invalid's sitting-room—so brilliantly lighted on other occasions—the moment she entered it. The lamps were shaded, and the candles were all extinguished. "My eyes don't bear the light so well as usual," Mrs. Delvin said. "Come and sit near me, Emily; I hope to quiet your mind. I should be grieved if you left my house with a wrong impression of me."

Knowing what she knew, suffering as she must have suffered, the quiet kindness of her tone implied an exercise of self-restraint which appealed irresistibly to Emily's sympathies. "Forgive me," she said, "for having done you an injustice. "I am ashamed to think that I shrank from seeing you when I returned from Belford."

"I will endeavour to be worthy of your

better opinion of me," Mrs. Delvin replied. "In one respect at least, I may claim to have had your best interests at heart—while we were still personally strangers. I tried to prevail on my poor brother to own the truth, when he discovered the terrible position in which he was placed towards you. He was too conscious of the absence of any proof which might induce you to believe him, if he attempted to defend himself—in one word, he was too timid—to take my advice. He has paid the penalty, and I have paid the penalty, of deceiving you."

Emily started. "In what way have you deceived me?" she asked.

"In the way that was forced on us by our own conduct," Mrs. Delvin said. "We have appeared to help you, without really doing so; we calculated on inducing you to marry my brother, and then (when he

could speak with the authority of a husband) on prevailing on you to give up all further inquiries. When you insisted on seeing Mrs. Rook, Miles had the money in his hand to bribe her and her husband to leave England.”

“Oh, Mrs. Delvin!”

“I don’t attempt to excuse myself. I don’t expect you to consider how sorely I was tempted to secure the happiness of my brother’s life, by marriage with such a woman as yourself. I don’t remind you that I knew—when I put obstacles in your way—that you were blindly devoting yourself to the discovery of an innocent man.”

Emily heard her with angry surprise, “Innocent?” she repeated. “Mrs. Rook recognised his voice the instant she heard him speak.”

Impenetrable to interruption, Mrs. Delvin went on.

“But what I do ask,” she persisted, “even after our short acquaintance, is this. Do you suspect me of deliberately scheming to make you the wife of a murderer?”

Emily had never viewed the serious question between them in this light. Warmly, generously, she answered the appeal that had been made to her. “Oh, don’t think that of me! I know I spoke thoughtlessly and cruelly to you, just now——”

“You spoke impulsively,” Mrs. Delvin interposed; “that was all. My one desire before we part—how can I expect you to remain here, after what has happened?—is to tell you the truth. I have no interested object in view; for all hope of your marriage with my brother is now at an end. May I ask if you have heard that he and your father were strangers, when they met at the inn?”

"Yes; I know that."

"If there had been any conversation between them, when they retired to rest, they might have mentioned their names. But your father was pre-occupied; and my brother, after a long day's walk, was so tired that he fell asleep as soon as his head was on the pillow. He only woke when the morning dawned. What he saw when he looked towards the opposite bed, might have struck with terror the boldest man that ever lived. His first impulse was naturally to alarm the house. When he got on his feet, he saw his own razor—a blood-stained razor on the bed by the side of the corpse. At that discovery, he lost all control over himself. In a panic of terror, he snatched up his knapsack, unfastened the yard door, and fled from the house. Knowing him, as you and I know him, can we wonder at it? Many a

man has been hanged for murder, on circumstantial evidence less direct than the evidence against poor Miles. His horror of his own recollections was so overpowering that he forbade me even to mention the inn at Zeeland in my letters, while he was abroad. ‘Never tell me (he wrote) who that wretched murdered stranger was; if I only heard of his name, I believe it would haunt me to my dying day.’ I ought not to trouble you with these details—and yet, I am surely not without excuse. In the absence of any proof, I cannot expect you to believe as I do in my brother’s innocence. But I may at least hope to show you that there is some reason for doubt. Will you give him the benefit of that doubt?”

“Willingly!” Emily replied. “Am I right in supposing that you don’t despair of proving his innocence, even yet?”

“I don’t quite despair. But my hopes have grown fainter and fainter, as the years have gone on. There is a person associated with his escape from Zeeland; a person named Jethro——”

“You mean Miss Jethro!”

“Yes. Do you know her?”

“I know her—and my father knew her. I have found a letter, addressed to him, which I have no doubt was written by Miss Jethro. It is barely possible that you may understand what it means. Pray look at it.”

“I am quite unable to help you,” Mrs. Delvin answered after reading the letter. All I know of Miss Jethro is that, but for her interposition, my brother might have fallen into the hands of the police. She saved him.”

“Knowing him of course?”

“That is the remarkable part of it:

they were perfect strangers to each other."

"But she must have had some motive."

"*There* is the foundation of my hope for Miles. Miss Jethro declared, when I wrote and put the question to her, that the one motive by which she was actuated was the motive of mercy. I don't believe her. To my mind, it is in the last degree improbable that she would consent to protect a stranger from discovery, who owned to her (as my brother did) that he was a fugitive suspected of murder. She knows something, I am firmly convinced, of that dreadful event at Zeeland—and she has some reason for keeping it secret. Have you any influence over her?"

"Tell me where I can find her."

"I can't tell you. She has removed from the address at which my brother

saw her last. He has made every possible inquiry—without result."

As she replied in those discouraging terms, the curtains which divided Mrs. Delvin's bedroom from her sitting-room were drawn aside. An elderly woman-servant approached her mistress's couch.

"Mr. Mirabel is awake, ma'am. He is very low; I can hardly feel his pulse. Shall I give him some more brandy?"

Mrs. Delvin held out her hand to Emily. "Come to me to-morrow morning," she said—and signed to the servant to wheel her couch into the next room. As the curtains closed over them, Emily heard Mirabel's voice. "Where am I?" he said, faintly. "Is it all a dream?"

The prospect of his recovery the next morning, was gloomy indeed. He had sunk into a state of deplorable weakness, in mind as well as in body. The little memory of

events that he still preserved, was regarded by him as the memory of a dream. He alluded to Emily, and to his meeting with her unexpectedly. But from that point his recollection failed him. They had talked of something interesting, he said—but he was unable to remember what it was. And they had waited together at a railway station—but for what purpose he could not tell. He sighed, and wondered when Emily would marry him—and so fell asleep again, weaker than ever.

Not having any confidence in the doctor at Belford, Mrs. Delvin had sent an urgent message to a physician at Edinburgh, famous for his skill in treating diseases of the nervous system. “I cannot expect him to reach this remote place, without some delay,” she said; “I must bear my suspense as well as I can.”

“You shall not bear it alone,” Emily

answered. "I will wait with you till the doctor comes."

Mrs. Delvin lifted her frail wasted hands to Emily's face, drew it a little nearer—and kissed her.

CHAPTER LXIV.

ON THE WAY TO LONDON.

THE parting words had been spoken. Emily and her companion were on their way to London.

For some little time, they travelled in silence — alone in the railway carriage. After submitting as long as she could to lay an embargo on the use of her tongue, Mrs. Ellmother started the conversation by means of a question: “Do you think Mr. Mirabel will get over it, Miss?”

“It’s useless to ask me,” Emily said. “Even the great man from Edinburgh is not able to decide yet, whether he will recover or not.”

"You have taken me into your confidence, Miss Emily, as you promised—and I have got something on my mind in consequence. May I mention it without giving offence?"

"What is it?"

"I wish you had never taken up with Mr. Mirabel."

Emily was silent. Mrs. Ellmother having a design of her own to accomplish, ventured to speak more plainly. "I often think of Mr. Alban Morris," she proceeded. "I always did like him, and I always shall."

Emily suddenly pulled down her veil. "Don't speak of him!" she said.

"I didn't mean to offend you."

"You don't offend me. You distress me. Oh, how often I have wished---!" She threw herself back in a corner of the carriage and said no more.

Although not remarkable for the possession of delicate tact, Mrs. Ellmother dis-

covered that the best course she could now follow was a course of silence.

Even at the time when she had most implicitly trusted Mirabel, the fear that she might have acted hastily and harshly towards Alban had occasionally troubled Emily's mind. The impression produced by later events had not only intensified this feeling, but had presented the motives of that true friend under an entirely new point of view. If she had been left in ignorance of the manner of her father's death—as Alban had designed to leave her ; as she would have been left, but for the treachery of Francine—how happily free she would have been from thoughts which it was now a terror to her to recall. She would have parted from Mirabel, when the visit to the pleasant country house had come to an end, remembering him as an amusing acquaintance and nothing more. He would have been

spared, and she would have been spared, the shock that had so cruelly assailed them both. What had she gained by Mrs. Rook's detestable confession? The result had been perpetual disturbance of mind provoked by self-torturing speculations on the subject of the murder. If Mirabel was innocent, who was guilty? The false wife, without pity and without shame—or the brutal husband, who looked capable of any enormity? What was her future to be? How was it all to end? In the despair of that bitter moment—seeing her devoted old servant looking at her with kind compassionate eyes—Emily's troubled spirit sought refuge in impetuous self-betrayal: the very betrayal which she had resolved should not escape her, hardly a minute since!

She bent forward out of her corner, and suddenly drew up her veil. "Do you

expect to see Mr. Alban Morris, when we get back?" she asked.

"I should like to see him, Miss—if you have no objection."

"Tell him I am ashamed of myself! and say I ask his pardon with all my heart!"

"The Lord be praised!" Mrs. Ellmother burst out—and then, when it was too late, remembered the conventional restraints appropriate to the occasion. "Gracious, what a fool I am!" she said to herself. "Beautiful weather, Miss Emily, isn't it?" she continued, in a desperate hurry to change the subject.

Emily reclined again in her corner of the carriage. She smiled, for the first time since she had become Mrs. Delvin's guest at the tower.

Book the First:
AT HOME AGAIN.

BOOK THE LAST:

At Home Again:

CHAPTER LXV.

CECILIA IN A NEW CHARACTER.

REACHING the cottage at night, Emily found the card of a visitor who had called during the day. It bore the name of "Miss Wyvil," and had a message written on it which strongly excited Emily's curiosity.

"I have seen the telegram which tells your servant that you return to-night. Expect me early to-morrow morning—with news that will deeply interest you."

To what news did Cecilia allude? Emily questioned the woman who had been left in charge of the cottage, and found that she

had next to nothing to tell. Miss Wyvil had flushed up, and had looked excited, when she read the telegraphic message—that was all. Emily's impatience was as usual, not to be concealed. Expert Mrs. Ellmother treated the case in the right way—first with supper, and then, with an adjournment to bed. The clock struck twelve, when she put out the young mistress's candle. "Ten hours to pass before Cecilia comes here!" Emily exclaimed. "Not ten minutes," Mrs. Ellmother reminded her, "if you will only go to sleep."

Cecilia arrived before the breakfast-table was cleared; as lovely, as gentle, as affectionate as ever—but looking unusually serious and subdued.

"Out with it at once!" Emily cried. "What have you got to tell me?"

"Perhaps, I had better tell you first," Cecilia said, "that I know what you kept

from me when I came here, after you left us at Monksmoor. Don't think, my dear, that I say this by way of complaint. Mr. Alban Morris says you had good reasons for keeping your secret."

"Mr. Alban Morris! Did you get your information from *him*?"

"Yes. Do I surprise you?"

"More than words can tell?"

"Can you bear another surprise? Mr. Morris has seen Miss Jethro, and has discovered that Mr. Mirabel has been wrongly suspected of a dreadful crime. Our amiable little clergyman is guilty of being a coward—and guilty of nothing else. Are you really quiet enough to read about it?"

She produced some leaves of paper filled with writing. "There," she explained, "is Mr. Morris's own account of all that passed between Miss Jethro and himself."

"But how do *you* come by it?"

"Mr. Morris gave it to me. He said, 'Show it to Emily as soon as possible; and take care to be with her while she reads it.' There is a reason for this——" Cecilia's voice faltered. On the brink of some explanation, she seemed to recoil from it. "I will tell you by and by what the reason is," she said.

Emily looked nervously at the manuscript. "Why doesn't he tell me himself what he has discovered? Is he——" The leaves began to flutter in her trembling fingers—"is he angry with me?"

"Oh, Emily, angry with You! Read what he has written and you shall know why he keeps away."

Emily opened the manuscript.

CHAPTER LXVI.

ALBAN'S NARRATIVE.

“THE information which I have obtained from Miss Jethro has been communicated to me, on the condition that I shall not disclose the place of her residence. ‘Let me pass out of notice (she said) as completely as if I had passed out of life; I wish to be forgotten by some, and to be unknown by others.’ With this one stipulation, she left me free to write the present narrative of what passed at the interview between us. I feel that the discoveries which I have made are too important to the persons interested to be trusted to memory.

1. *She Receives Me.*

"Finding Miss Jethro's place of abode, with far less difficulty than I had anticipated (thanks to favouring circumstances), I stated plainly the object of my visit. She declined to enter into conversation with me on the subject of the murder at Zeeland.

"I was prepared to meet with this rebuff, and to take the necessary measures for obtaining a more satisfactory reception. 'A person is suspected of having committed the murder,' I said; 'and there is reason to believe that you are in a position to say whether the suspicion is justified or not. Do you refuse to answer me, if I put the question?'

"Miss Jethro asked who the person was.

"I mentioned the name—Mr. Miles Mirabel.

“It is not necessary, and it would certainly be not agreeable to me, to describe the effect which this reply produced on Miss Jethro. After giving her time to compose herself, I entered into certain explanations, in order to convince her at the outset of my good faith. The result justified my anticipations. I was at once admitted to her confidence.

“She said, ‘I must not hesitate to do an act of justice to an innocent man. But, in such a serious matter as this, you have a right to judge for yourself whether the person who is now speaking to you is a person whom you can trust. You may believe that I tell the truth about others, if I begin—whatever it may cost me—by telling the truth about myself.’

2. *She Speaks of Herself.*

“I shall not attempt to place on record

the confession of a most unhappy woman. It was the common story of sin bitterly repented, and of vain effort to recover the lost place in social esteem. Too well known a story, surely, to be told again.

"But I may with perfect propriety repeat what Miss Jethro said to me, in allusion to later events in her life which are connected with my own personal experience. She recalled to my memory a visit which she had paid to me at Netherwoods, and a letter addressed to her by Doctor Allday, which I had read at her express request.

"She said, 'You may remember that the letter contained some severe reflections on my conduct. Among other things, the doctor mentions that he called at the lodging I occupied during my visit to London, and found I had taken to flight: also that he had reason to believe I had entered Miss Ladd's service, under false pretences.'

“I asked if the doctor had wronged her.

“She answered, ‘No: in one case, he is ignorant; in the other, he is right. On leaving his house, I found myself followed in the street by the man to whom I owe the shame and misery of my past life. My horror of him is not to be described in words. The one way of escaping him was offered by an empty cab that passed me. I reached the railway station safely, and went back to my home in the country. Do you blame me?’

“It was impossible to blame her—and I said so. ‘

“She then confessed the deception which she had practised on Miss Ladd. ‘I have a cousin,’ she said, ‘who was a Miss Jethro like me. Before her marriage she had been employed as a governess. She pitied me; she sympathised with my longing to recover

the character that I had lost. With her permission, I made use of the testimonials which she had earned as a teacher—I was betrayed (to this day I don't know by whom)—and I was dismissed from Netherwoods. Now you know that I deceived Miss Ladd, you may reasonably conclude that I am likely to deceive You.'

"I assured her, with perfect sincerity, that I had drawn no such conclusion. Encouraged by my reply, Miss Jethro proceeded as follows.

3. *She Speaks of Mirabel.*

"‘FOUR years ago, I was living near Cowes, in the Isle of Wight—in a cottage which had been taken for me by a gentleman who was the owner of a yacht. We had just returned from a short cruise, and the vessel was under orders to sail for Cherbourg with the next tide.

“ ‘While I was walking in my garden, I was startled by the sudden appearance of a man (evidently a gentleman) who was a perfect stranger to me. He was in a pitiable state of terror, and he implored my protection. In reply to my first inquiries, he mentioned the inn at Zeeland, and the dreadful death of a person unknown to him; whom I recognised (partly by the description given, and partly by comparison of dates) as Mr. James Brown. I shall say nothing of the shock inflicted on me: you don't want to know what I felt. What I did (having literally only a minute left for decision) was to hide the fugitive from discovery, and to exert my influence in his favour with the owner of the yacht. I saw nothing more of him. He was put on board, as soon as the police were out of sight, and was safely landed at Cherbourg.’

"I asked what induced her to run the risk of protecting a stranger, who was under suspicion of having committed a murder.

"She said, 'You shall hear my explanation directly. Let us have done with Mr. Mirabel first. We occasionally corresponded, during his long absence on the continent; never alluding, at his express request, to the horrible event at the inn. His last letter reached me, after he had established himself at Vale Regis. Writing of the society in the neighbourhood, he informed me of his introduction to Miss Wyvil, and of the invitation that he had received to meet her friend and schoolfellow at Monksmoor. I knew that Miss Emily possessed a Handbill describing personal peculiarities in Mr. Mirabel, not hidden under the changed appearance of his head and face. If she remembered or happened to refer to that description, while she was living in the

same house with him, there was a possibility at least of her suspicion being excited. The fear of this took me to you. It was a morbid fear, and, as events turned out an unfounded fear; but I was unable to control it. Failing to produce any effect on you, I went to Vale Regis, and tried (vainly again) to induce Mr. Mirabel to send an excuse to Monksmoor. He, like you, wanted to know what my motive was. When I tell you that I acted solely in Miss Emily's interests, and that I knew how she had been deceived about her father's death, need I say why I was afraid to acknowledge my motive?'

"I understood that Miss Jethro might well be afraid of the consequences, if she risked any allusion to Mr. Brown's horrible death, and if it afterwards chanced to reach his daughter's ears. But this state of feeling implied an extraordinary interest in the

preservation of Emily's peace of mind. I asked Miss Jethro how that interest had been excited?

"She answered, 'I can only satisfy you in one way. I must speak of her father now.'"

Emily looked up from the manuscript. She felt Cecilia's arm tenderly caressing her. She heard Cecilia say, "My poor dear, there is one last trial of your courage still to come. I am afraid of what you are going to read, when you turn to the next page. And yet——"

"And yet," Emily replied gently, "it must be done. I have learnt my hard lesson of endurance, Cecilia; don't be afraid."

Emily turned to the next page.

4. *She Speaks of The Dead.*

"For the first time, Miss Jethro appeared to be at a loss how to proceed. I could

see that she was suffering. She rose, and, opening a drawer in her writing table, took a letter from it.

“She said, ‘Will you read this? It was written by Miss Emily’s father. Perhaps it may say more for me, than I can say for myself?’

“I copy the letter. It was thus expressed :

“‘You have declared that our farewell to-day is our farewell for ever. For the second time, you have refused to be my wife ; and you have done this, to use your own words, in mercy to Me.

“‘In mercy to Me, I implore you to reconsider your decision.

“‘If you condemn me to live without you—I feel it, I know it—you condemn me to despair which I have not fortitude enough to endure. Look at the passages

which I have marked for you in the New Testament. Again and again, I say it; your true repentance has made you worthy of the pardon of God. Are you not worthy of the love, admiration, and respect of man? Think! oh, Sara, think of what our lives might be, and let them be lives united for time and for eternity.

““I can write no more. A deadly faintness oppresses me. My mind is in a state, unknown to me in past years. I am in such confusion that I sometimes think I hate you. And then I recover from my delusion, and know that man never loved woman as I love you.

““You will have time to write to me by this evening’s post. I shall stop at Zeeland to-morrow, on my way back, and ask for a letter at the post-office. I forbid explanations and excuses. I forbid heartless allusions to your duty. Let me have

an answer which does not keep me for a moment in suspense.

“‘For the last time, I ask you: Do you consent to be my wife? Say, Yes—or say, No.’

“I gave her back the letter—with the one comment on it, which the circumstances permitted me to make:

“‘You said No?’

“She bent her head in silence.

“I went on—not willingly, for I would have spared her if it had been possible. I said, ‘He died, despairing, by his own hand—and you knew it?’

“She looked up. ‘No! To say that I knew it is too much. To say that I feared it is the truth.’

“‘Did you love him?’

“She eyed me in stern surprise. ‘Have I any right to love? Could I disgrace an

honourable man by allowing him to marry me? You look as if you held me responsible for his death.’

“‘Innocently responsible,’ I said.

“She still followed her own train of thought. ‘Do you suppose I could for a moment anticipate that he would destroy himself, when I wrote my reply? He was a truly religious man. If he had been in his right mind, he would have shrunk from the idea of suicide as from the idea of a crime.’

“On reflection, I was inclined to agree with her. In his terrible position, it was at least possible that the sight of the razor (placed ready, with the other appliances of the toilet, for his fellow-traveller’s use) might have fatally tempted a man, whose last hope was crushed, whose mind was tortured by despair. I should have been merciless indeed, if I had held Miss

Jethro accountable thus far. But I found it hard to sympathise with the course which she had pursued, in permitting Mr. Brown's death to be attributed to murder without a word of protest. 'Why were you silent?' I said.

"She smiled bitterly.

"'A woman would have known why, without asking,' she replied. 'A woman would have understood that I shrank from a public confession of my shameful past life. A woman would have remembered what reasons I had for pitying the man who loved me, and for accepting any responsibility rather than associate his memory, before the world, with an unworthy passion for a degraded creature, ending in an act of suicide. Even if I had made that cruel sacrifice, would public opinion have believed such a person as I am—against the evidence of a medical man, and the

verdict of a jury? No, Mr. Morris! I said nothing, and I was resolved to say nothing, so long as the choice of alternatives was left to me. On the day when Mr. Mirabel implored me to save him, that choice was no longer mine—and you know what I did. And now again when suspicion (after all the long interval that has passed) has followed and found that innocent man, you know what I have done. What more do you ask of me?’

“‘Your pardon,’ I said, ‘for not having understood you—and a last favour. May I repeat what I have heard to the one person of all others, who ought to know, and who must know, what you have told me?’

“It was needless to hint more plainly that I was speaking of Emily. Miss Jethro granted my request.

“‘It shall be as you please,’ she an-

swered. ‘Say for me to *his* daughter, that the grateful remembrance of her is my one refuge from the thoughts that tortured me, when we spoke together on her last night at school. She has made this dead heart of mine feel a reviving breath of life, when I think of her. Never, in our earthly pilgrimage, shall we meet again—I implore her to pity and forget me. Farewell, Mr. Morris; farewell for ever.’

“I confess that the tears came into my eyes. When I could see clearly again, I was alone in the room.”

CHAPTER LXVII.

THE TRUE CONSOLATION.

EMILY closed the pages which told her that her father had died by his own hand.

Cecilia still held her tenderly embraced. By slow degrees, her head drooped until it rested on her friend's bosom. Silently she suffered. Silently Cecilia bent forward, and kissed her forehead. The sounds that penetrated to the room were not out of harmony with the time. From a distant house the voices of children were just audible, singing the plaintive melody of a hymn; and, now and then, the breeze blew the first faded leaves of autumn against the window. Neither of the girls

knew how long the minutes followed each other uneventfully, before there was a change. Emily raised her head, and looked at Cecilia.

“I have one friend left,” she said.

“Not only me, love—oh, I hope not only me!”

“Yes. Only you.”

“I want to say something, Emily; but I am afraid of hurting you.”

“My dear, do you remember what we once read in a book of history at school? It told of the death of a tortured man, in the old time, who was broken on the wheel. He lived through it long enough to say that the agony, after the first stroke of the club, dulled his capacity for feeling pain when the next blows fell. I fancy pain of the mind must follow the same rule. Nothing you can say will hurt me now.”

"I only wanted to ask, Emily, if you were engaged—at one time—to marry Mr. Mirabel. Is it true?"

"False! He pressed me to consent to an engagement—and I said he must not hurry me."

"What made you say that?"

"I thought of Alban Morris."

Vainly Cecilia tried to restrain herself. A cry of joy escaped her.

"Are you glad?" Emily asked. "Why?"

Cecilia made no direct reply. "May I tell you what you wanted to know, a little while since?" she said. "You asked why Mr. Morris left it all to me, instead of speaking to you himself. When I put the same question to him, he told me to read what he had written. 'Not a shadow of suspicion rests on Mr. Mirabel,' he said. 'Emily is free to marry him—and free through Me. Can *I* tell her that?"

For her sake, and for mine, it must not be. All that I can do is to leave old remembrances to plead for me. If they fail, I shall know that she will be happier with Mr. Mirabel than with me.' 'And you will submit?' I asked. 'Because I love her,' he answered, 'I must submit.' Oh, how pale you are! Have I distressed you?"

"You have done me good."

"Will you see him?"

Emily pointed to the manuscript. "At such a time as this?" she said.

Cecilia still held to her resolution. "Such a time as this is the right time," she answered. "It is now, when you most want to be comforted, that you ought to see him. Who can quiet your poor aching heart as *he* can quiet it?" She impulsively snatched at the manuscript, and threw it out of sight. "I can't bear to

look at it," she said. "Emily! if I have done wrong, will you forgive me? I saw him this morning before I came here. I was afraid of what might happen—I refused to break the dreadful news to you, unless he was somewhere near us. Your good old servant knows where to go. Let me send her——"

Mrs. Ellmother herself opened the door, and stood doubtful on the threshold, hysterically sobbing and laughing at the same time. "I'm everything that's bad!" the good old creature burst out. "I've been listening—I've been lying—I said you wanted him. Turn me out of my situation, if you like. I've got him! Here he is!"

In another moment, Emily was in his arms—and they were alone. On his faithful breast the blessed relief of tears came to her at last: she burst out crying.

“Oh, Alban, can you forgive me?”

He gently raised her head, so that he could see her face.

“My love, let me look at you,” he said. “I want to think again of the day when we parted in the garden at school. Do you remember the one conviction that sustained me? I told you, Emily, there was a time of fulfilment to come in our two lives; and I have never wholly lost that dear belief. My own darling, the time has come!”

POSTSCRIPT.

GOSSIP IN THE STUDIO.

THE winter time had arrived. Alban was cleaning his palette, after a hard day's work at the cottage. The servant announced that tea was ready, and that Miss Ladd was waiting to see him in the next room.

Alban ran in, and received the visitor cordially with both hands. "Welcome back to England! I needn't ask if the sea-voyage has done you good. You are looking ten years younger than when you went away."

Miss Ladd smiled. "I shall soon be ten years older again, if I go back to

Netherwoods," she replied. "I didn't believe it at the time; but I know better now. Our friend Doctor Allday was right, when he said that my working days were over. I must give up the school to a younger and stronger successor, and make the best I can in retirement of what is left of my life. You and Emily may expect to have me as a near neighbour. Where is Emily?"

"Far away in the north."

"In the north! You don't mean that she has gone back to Mrs. Delvin?"

"She has gone back—with Mrs. Ellmother to take care of her, at my express request. You know what Emily is, when there is an act of mercy to be done. That unhappy man has been sinking (with intervals of partial recovery) for months past. Mrs. Delvin sent word to us that the end was near, and that the one last

wish her brother was able to express was the wish to see Emily. He had been for some hours unable to speak, when my wife arrived. But he knew her, and smiled faintly. He was just able to lift his hand. She took it, and waited by him, and spoke words of consolation and kindness from time to time. As the night advanced, he sank into sleep, still holding her hand. They only knew that he had passed from sleep to death—passed without a movement or a sigh—when his hand turned cold. Emily remained for a day at the tower to comfort poor Mrs. Delvin—and she comes home, thank God, this evening!"

"I needn't ask if you are happy?" Miss Ladd said.

"Happy? I sing, when I have my bath in the morning. If that isn't happiness (in a man of my age) I don't know what is!"

"And how are you getting on?"

“Famously! I have turned portrait painter, since you were sent away for your health. A portrait of Mr. Wyvil is to decorate the town hall in the place that he represents; and our dear kind-hearted Cecilia has induced a fascinated mayor and corporation to confide the work to my hands.”

“Is there no hope yet of that sweet girl being married?” Miss Ladd asked. “We old maids all believe in marriage, Mr. Morris—though some of us don’t own it.”

“There seems to be a chance,” Alban answered. “A young lord has turned up at Monksmoor; a handsome pleasant fellow, and a rising man in politics. He happened to be in the house a few days before Cecilia’s birthday; and he asked my advice about the right present to give her. I said, ‘Try something new in Tarts.’

When he found I was in earnest, what do you think he did? Sent his steam yacht to Rouen for some of the famous pastry! You should have seen Cecilia, when the young lord offered his delicious gift. If I could paint that smile and those eyes, I should be the greatest artist living. I believe she will marry him. Need I say how rich they will be? We shall not envy them—we are rich too. Everything is comparative. The portrait of Mr. Wyvil will put three hundred pounds in my pocket. I have earned a hundred and twenty more by illustrations, since we have been married. And my wife's income (I like to be particular) is only five shillings and tenpence short of two hundred a year. Moral! we are rich as well as happy."

"Without a thought of the future?" Miss Ladd asked silyly.

"Oh, Doctor Allday has taken the future

in hand! He revels in the old-fashioned jokes, which used to be addressed to newly-married people, in his time. ‘My dear fellow,’ he said the other day, ‘you may possibly be under a joyful necessity of sending for the doctor, before we are all a year older. In that case, let it be understood that I am Honorary Physician to the family.’ The warm-hearted old man talks of getting me another portrait to do. ‘The greatest ass in the medical profession’ (he informed me) ‘has just been made a baronet; and his admiring friends have decided that he is to be painted at full length, with his bandy legs hidden under a gown, and his great globular eyes staring at the spectator—I’ll get you the job.’ Shall I tell you what he says of Mrs. Rook’s recovery?”

Miss Ladd held up her hands in amazement. “Recovery!” she exclaimed.

"And a most remarkable recovery, too," Alban informed her. "It is the first case on record of any person getting over such an injury as she has received. Doctor Allday looked grave when he heard of it. 'I begin to believe in the devil,' he said; 'nobody else could have saved Mrs. Rook.' Other people don't take that view. She has been celebrated in all the medical newspapers—and she has been admitted to some excellent almshouses, to live in comfortable idleness to a green old age. The best of it is that she shakes her head, when her wonderful recovery is mentioned. 'It seems such a pity,' she says; 'I was so fit for heaven.' Mr. Rook, having got rid of his wife, is in excellent spirits. He is occupied in looking after an imbecile old gentleman; and, when he is asked if he likes the employment, he winks mysteriously and slaps his pocket

Now, Miss Ladd, I think it's my turn to hear some news. What have you got to tell me?"

"I believe I can match your account of Mrs. Rook," Miss Ladd said. "Do you care to hear what has become of Francine?"

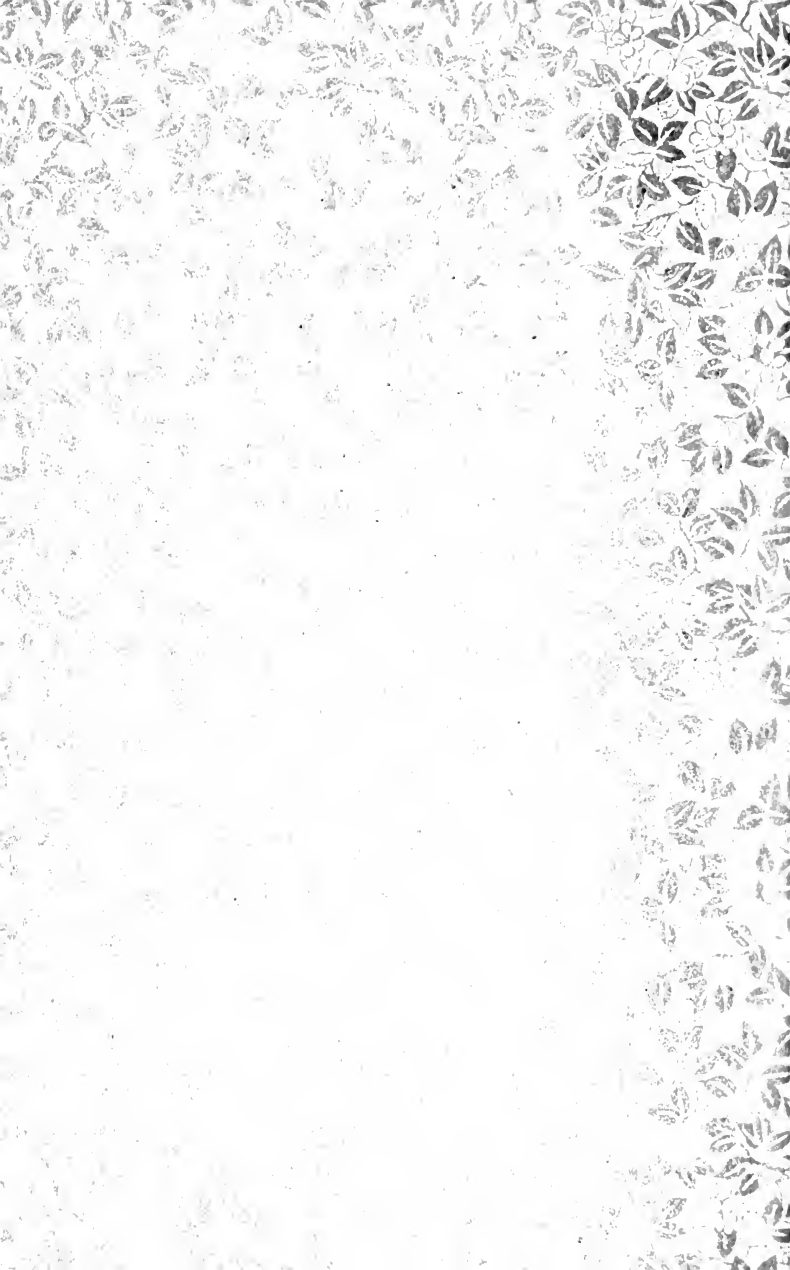
Alban rattling on hitherto in boyish high spirits, suddenly became serious. "I have no doubt Miss de Sor is doing well," he said, sternly. "She is too heartless and wicked not to prosper."

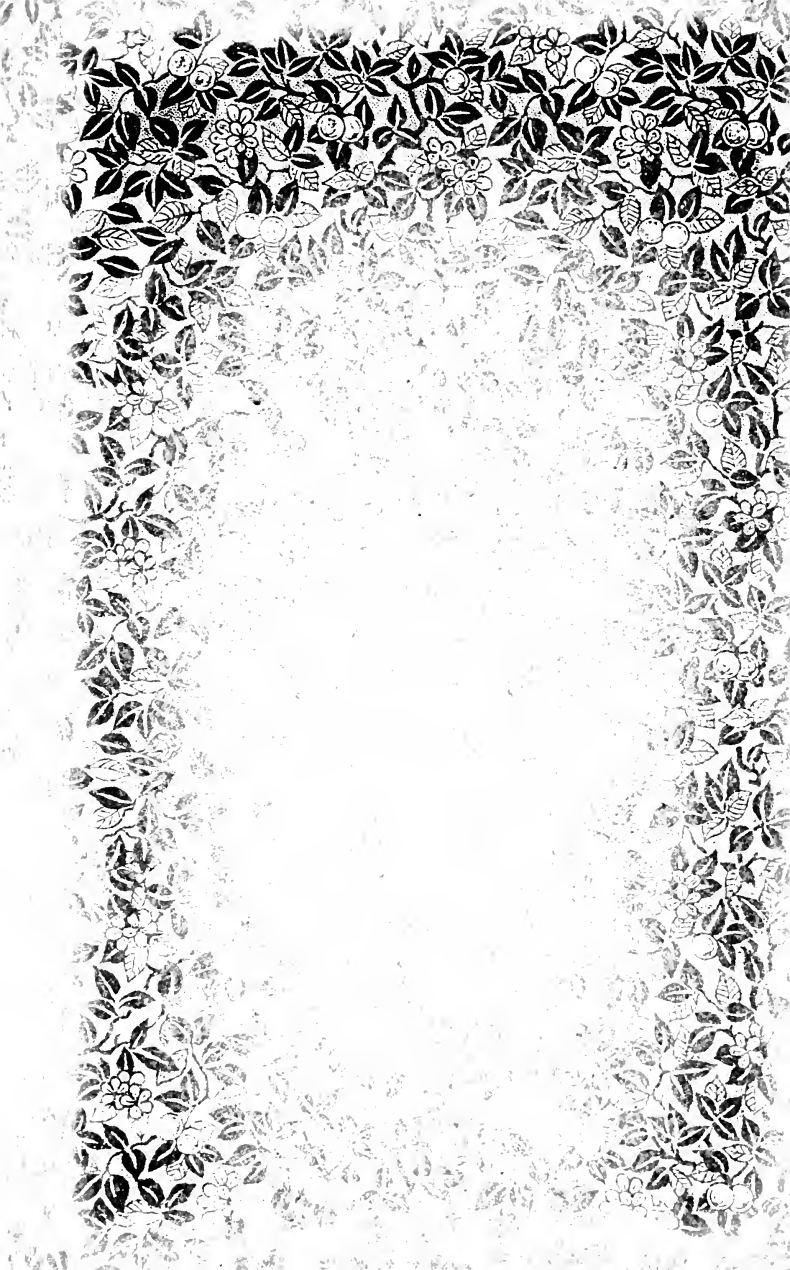
"You are getting like your old cynical self again, Mr. Morris—and you are wrong. I called this morning on the agent who had the care of Francine, when I left England. When I mentioned her name, he showed me a telegram, sent to him by her father. 'There's my authority,' he said, 'for letting her leave my house.' The message was short enough to be easily

remembered: 'Anything my daughter likes as long as she doesn't come back to us.' In those cruel terms Mr. de Sor wrote of his own child. The agent was just as unfeeling, in his way. He called her the victim of slighted love and clever proselytising. 'In plain words,' he said, 'the priest of the Catholic chapel close by has converted her; and she is now a novice in a convent of Carmelite nuns in the West of England.' Who could have expected it? Who knows how it may yet end?"

As Miss Ladd spoke, the bell rang at the cottage gate. "Here she is!" Alban cried, leading the way into the hall. "Emily has come home."

THE END.





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